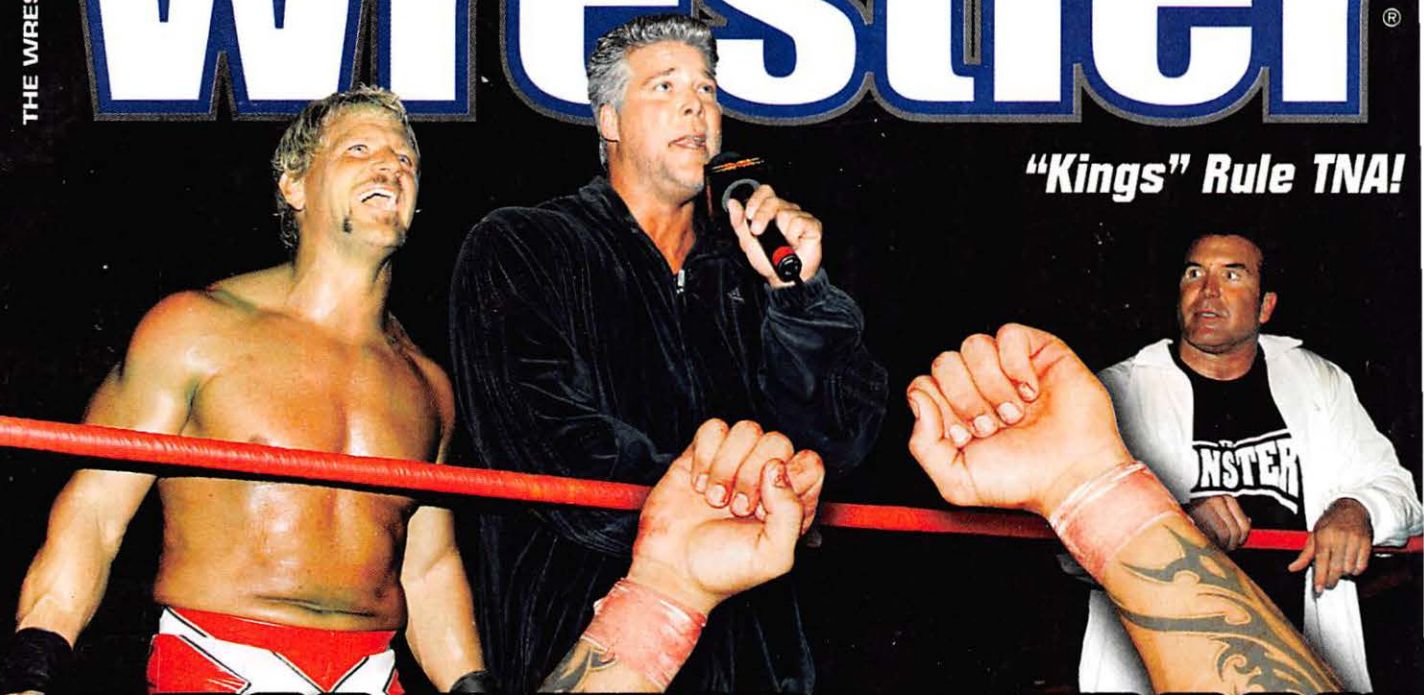


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THE WRESTLER SERIES

# the **Wrestler**

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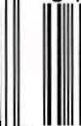
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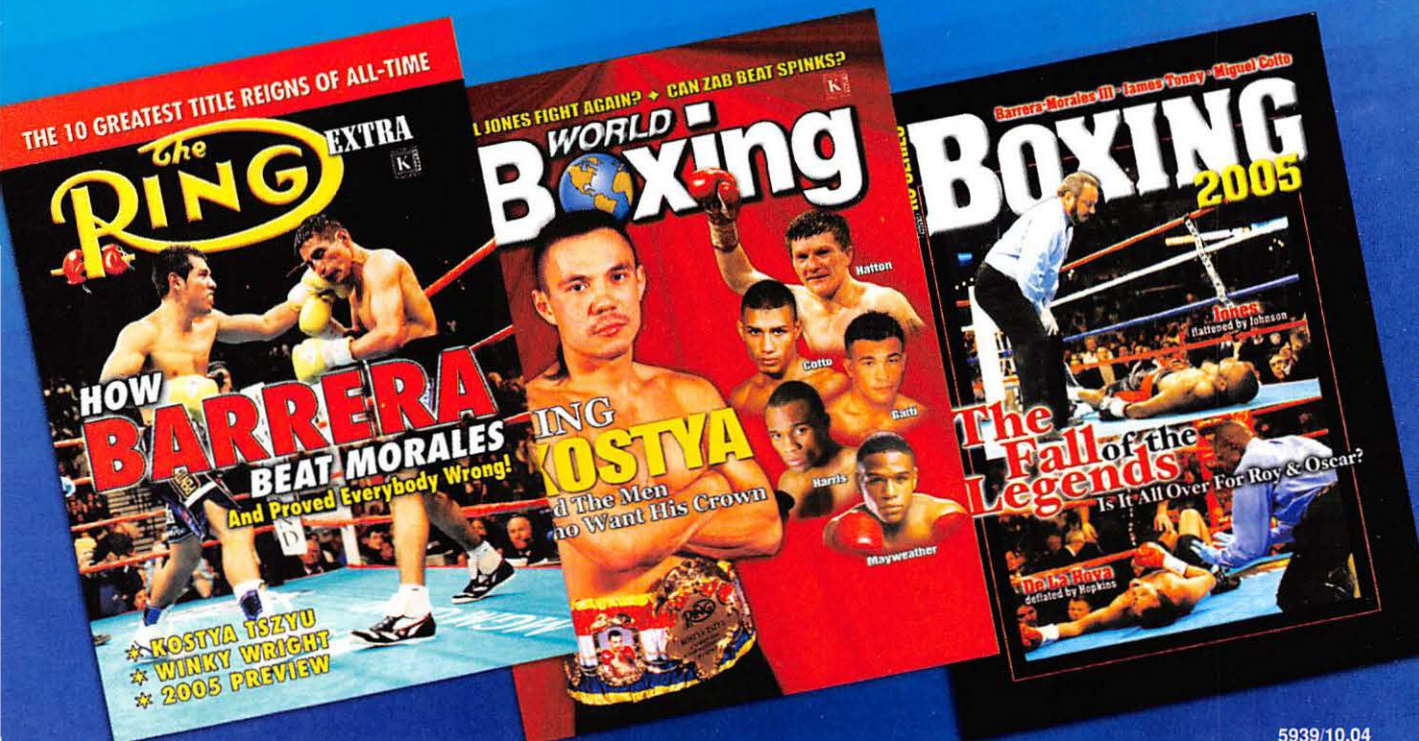
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April 2005

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#### COVER PHOTOS:

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Jeff Jarrett, Kevin Nash, & Scott Hall by Vern Verna

Eddie Guerrero-Mark Jindrak by Gary Dineen

#### COVER DESIGN:

Monica Fisher

Look for the June 2005 issue of THE WRESTLER on sale March 29, 2005



# your letters

## VICTORY SPOILED

I was really looking forward to the first Sunday night TNA pay-per-view, Victory Road. I had purchased a number of the weekly pay-per-views and was excited to see some of the guys who put TNA on the map get a chance on a big program like this. Guys like A.J. Styles, America's Most Wanted, Monty Brown, Abyss, and others. I did get a chance to see these guys, but then the show ended with Kevin Nash, Scott Hall, and Randy Savage. What is this, 1998?

I liked the NWO as much as anyone, but how is TNA supposed to attract new fans by bringing in these guys? I don't mind a little old school, but are these guys going to be the future of the organization?

ROD CURLEY  
Charlotte, NC

## CHANGE OF HEART

I was never a big fan of *Tough Enough* and I thought bringing the show to *Smackdown* was a big mistake. But I have to admit, those segments at the beginning of each show have been really entertaining.

I loved watching those punks mouth off to The Big Show and then get slammed by the big man. Kurt Angle read them each the riot act and then took two of them to school in the ring. I even thought the Mae Young segment was funny. I don't even care who wins—I just love watching these guys get abused by all the other wrestlers! Maybe next the contestants can try to catch Rey Misterio Jr. as he runs around an arena. Or maybe they can all take turns taking a Dudley death drop through a table. The possibilities are endless!

Keep up the abuse, WWE!

AL DeVITO  
Villa Park, IL

## FIRE KANE ALREADY

I was really shocked when WWE had its mass firing a few weeks ago, getting rid of guys like A-Train, Rico, Test, Chuck Palumbo, and Billy Gunn. But my shock wasn't because they let go of these guys—they were getting a little stale. I was shocked because they kept another stale wrestler, Kane.

Am I the only one who changes the channel anytime Kane appears on TV? The worst thing the WWE ever did was let him speak. I loved the evil monster Kane with the original mask. I didn't even mind when he became a good guy and teamed with guys like X-Pac and Hurricane. But now he is just so weak. Losing to Matt Hardy? Tapping out to Chris Benoit? Give us all a break and get rid of Kane.

JUSTIN HOWARD  
San Diego, CA

## NEW BLOOD FOR EVOLUTION

I am a big fan of Evolution and was really upset to see Randy Orton leave the group. He's going to get what he has coming to him for turning his back on "The Game," but I also



Randy Savage showing up at the end of TNA's Victory Road PPV was a big surprise, though not a pleasant one to reader Rod Curley.

think it leaves Evolution in a vulnerable position.

Triple-H is the man, and he needs to be protected at all times. Batista can handle that. Ric Flair is the emotional leader and a great influence on Helmsley and Batista. But without Orton, Evolution is missing something that they desperately need.



Seeing a photo of Kane down on the mat and writhing in pain probably won't bother reader Justin Howard, who wouldn't mind seeing him out of WWE.





Robert Conway and Sylvan Grenier have quietly become the dominant team in WWE. They have a fan in Scott Barend.

I thought Edge would have been a good choice, especially when he started making his turn to the dark side. However, I don't think Helmsley would trust Edge, and for good reason. I looked through the names on the roster and think I have come up with the perfect pick for the newest Evolution member.

Maven.

It might sound crazy, but Maven is just the kind of guy Evolution needs. He is finally in main events and is going to want to stay there. If he hooks up with Evolution, he will. He is not good enough to beat Triple-H yet, so he shouldn't even be worrying about the Raw title. He would benefit because he would learn from Flair and HHH. Plus, Triple-H would benefit because he would have a guy to do his dirty work. It's a win-win situation.

DIANNA GONZALES  
New York, NY

## NO CRYING IN WRESTLING!

I read every issue of THE WRESTLER and love your magazine. My favorites are Chris Benoit and Eddie Guerrero, and I think they both should have kept their titles for a little longer because they're two of the

best wrestlers in WWE today. At SummerSlam, when Chris Benoit lost the title, I cried. I did the same when he won it at WrestleMania XX. At No Way Out, I cried when Eddie Guerrero won his title.

Chris Benoit is my idol. I love him to death, and Eddie Guerrero is my other idol. I know everything about Benoit. He's all over my room, my locker, and my binder.

ALISSA MARTINI  
Wichita, KS

## VIVA LA RESISTANCE!

Liz Hunter had a great article in the January issue of THE WRESTLER about Raw tag team champions La Resistance. She was right on every point. Robert Conway and Sylvan Grenier have made themselves the top dogs in the tag team ranks. Sure, there aren't a lot of great tag teams in WWE right now, but who cares?

To be honest, I'm not sure any of the legendary WWE tag teams, from The Hart Foundation to The British Bulldogs, could beat La Resistance anyway. Conway and Grenier are just getting better with each victory. They are going to rule the tag team division for a long time.

SCOTT BAREND  
Worcester, MA □

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# what's happening?

By Dan Murphy

**T**NA HAS TAKEN a page from **Vince McMahon's** old "Attitude" playbook and launched a **DeGeneration X**-style sneak attack on their rivals.

In early-November, WWE sent a crew to Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida, to shoot a commercial for the Royal Rumble pay-per-view. As it turned out, the site of the shoot was practically next door to the soundstage where TNA holds its TV tapings for both *Impact* and *Xplosion*,

and TNA decided to send out a "welcoming committee" to greet the WWE crew.

TNA wrestlers **Abyss**, **Shane Douglas**, **Tracy Brooks**, **3 Live Kru**, announcer **Jeremy Borash**, and video production chief **David Sahadi** (who left WWE for TNA and has earned critical praise for his recent promotional videos for the company) visited the shoot bearing cookies and balloons. McMahon was furious over the interruption, particularly over reports that TNA had filmed part of the episode. WWE quickly threatened legal action, demanding that TNA turn over all video of the event and seeking an injunction against any of the footage being aired.

TNA then issued a press release, stating that "TNA and the TNA superstars involved are very disappointed with any threats of legal action," portraying the incident as a friendly visit. However, if TNA executives were really looking to make WWE employees feel welcome, they probably could have done better than send the vocally anti-WWE (at least in years past) Douglas and Sahadi, whose resignation from WWE is probably still a sore spot with the company. Ironically, shortly after the incident, Sahadi announced he was leaving TNA to promote his forthcoming book, although he might return in the future.

"The Balloon Invasion" was reminiscent of **Triple H's** hilarious 1998 "invasion" of a *WCW Monday Nitro* event at which he and DX demanded that WCW "free" **Scott Hall** and **Kevin Nash**. That episode was one of many turning points in the WWF vs. WCW Monday night war, and it's obvious that the TNA front office is hoping it can give TNA some momentum, just as DX's stunt did years ago. Many find it odd that McMahon took the whole episode so seriously.

In other WWE news, morale has been extremely low in recent weeks following the spate of talent releases in November (see story on page 58). Now several WWE wrestlers and even developmental talents are very nervous, hoping they won't be among the targets if the ax falls again. Many sources in WWE insist that no more talent cuts are imminent, but considering that some of the wrestlers cut were used in fairly prominent roles just days before getting the news, that could change quickly.

That sense of dread and insecurity might be good news for TNA. WWE talent who feel they haven't been getting used to their full potential have taken notice of TNA's new direction and acquisition of Hall, Nash, **Randy Savage**, and **Dallas Page**. To



Who wouldn't appreciate a welcoming committee featuring Tracy Brooks? Apparently Vince McMahon. Brooks and Shane Douglas (Michael Shane, right, wasn't there) and a few other TNA stars got a bit of a hostile reception when they crashed a WWE commercial shoot in Orlando.



some, TNA is looking more and more like a solid career option. However, industry insiders are still not sure whether TNA will ever be able to turn a profit, and thus the company's future is uncertain. Of course, it has been ever since the first TNA pay-per-view was held in June 2002, but so far, it has managed to survive. Incidentally, just before press time, **Dusty Rhodes** was named the new head of the TNA creative team, replacing **Jeff Jarrett**, so we'll see if there is any noticeable change in the creative direction the promotion takes.

WWE introduced two of its most controversial characters ever in **Muhammad Hassan** (formerly known as **Mark Magnus** in OVW) and his manager, **Khosrow Daivari** (formerly known as **Shawn Daivari** on the independent circuit). Just before making their WWE TV debuts, the pair (along with then-bodyguard **Osama**) almost caused a mini-riot at an OVW TV taping in the new Davis Arena in Louisville. A fan became incensed with Hassan's anti-American rhetoric and tried to storm the ring, setting off a wild melee that even had veteran wrestlers buzzing.

"After the show, I had fans coming up to me begging us to get rid of those guys before somebody got hurt, or worse," said one OVW employee. Hassan and Daivari will certainly make things interesting in WWE in the coming months. I'm not sure if it will be in a good or bad way, though.

New OVW Southern tag champions were crowned on November 10 when the team of **Johnny Nitro** and **Joey Matthews** (managed by **Melina Perez**) defeated **Seth Skyfire** and **Mac Johnson** for the belts. I had the good fortune to be there when the belts changed hands and I can tell you this—the sooner WWE puts Nitro, Matthews, and Melina on the main roster the better. The three make one of the coolest and most exciting cliques in wrestling today.

OVW also managed to raise \$4,300 for charity with its November 12 "Crusade Rumble," which featured several top WWE stars. Results of that card were as follows: **Alexis**

(Continued on page 77)



Remember Eric Bischoff's old apprentice, Johnny Nitro? He has improved a lot in OVW, and he and Joey Matthews recently won the Southern tag title. Their shapely valet, Melina, completes the trio.

## "LASHING OUT!"

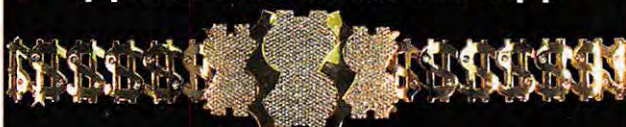
By Lash "Cooter" LeRoux





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Intercontinental (WWEKB31)

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## United States Championship Belt

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Mini Replica **WWEMINI16** \$30.00

## Intercontinental Championship Belt

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Chris Jericho • Goldust • Shawn Michaels



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Mini Replica **WWEMINI18** \$30.00

## Cruiserweight Championship Belt

Nameplates Available: Blank  
Billy Kidman • The Hurricane  
Rey Mysterio • Jamie Noble  
Tajiri



Adult-Size Replica **WWEB10** \$225.00  
Kid-Size Replica **WWEKB10** \$109.00  
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Mini Replica **WWEMINI10** \$30.00

## Women's Championship Belt

Nameplates Available: Blank  
Lita • Ivory • Jazz  
Trish Stratus • Molly Holly • Torrie Wilson  
Stacy Keibler • Victoria



Adult-Size Replica **WWEB11** \$225.00  
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Deluxe Replica **WWEDB11** \$369.00  
Mini Replica **WWEMINI11** \$30.00

## Undisputed Championship Belt Version 1

Nameplates Available: Blank • Brock Lesnar  
Triple H • Chris Jericho • Hulk Hogan  
Undertaker • The Rock • Kurt Angle



Adult-Size Replica **WWEB9** \$225.00  
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Mini Replica **WWEMINI9** \$30.00

## Tag Team Championship Belt

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Chris Benoit • Eddie Guerrero • John Cena  
Matt Hardy • Rey Mysterio



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Kid-Size Replica \$99.00  
Cruiserweight **WCWKB4**  
World Heavyweight **WCWKB1**  
World Television **WCWKB5**  
Nameplates available: (World Heavyweight Champion only)  
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Shawn Michaels • Kurt Angle • Triple H • Blank  
Adult-Size Replica \$199.00  
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Brock Lesnar (holding Kurt Angle) (WWEP003)  
Brock Lesnar (studio shot) (WWEP002)  
Goldberg (studio shot) (WWEP005)  
Chris Jericho (stretching Michaels) (WWEP004)  
Shawn Michaels (slamming Jericho) (WWEP012)  
Shawn Michaels (studio shot) (WWEP013)  
Kevin Nash (studio shot) (WWEP009)  
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Trish Stratus (studio shot) (WWEP018)  
Kane (studio shot) (WWEP006)  
Steve Austin (arms raised) (WWEP015)  
The Rock (studio shot) (WWEP010)  
Kurt Angle (studio shot) (WWEP008)  
Kurt Angle (performing Ankle Lock) (WWEP007)  
Rey Mysterio (arms crossed) (WWEP020)  
Sable (laying down flat) (WWEP021)  
Steve Austin (with vest) (WWEP024)  
Ric Flair (in robe) (WWEP025)  
Steve Austin (pointing) (WWEP026)  
Sable (in bikini) (WWEP027)  
Goldberg (slamming Steven Richards) (WWEP028)  
Shawn Michaels (slamming Ric Flair) (WWEP029)  
Chris Jericho (with vest) (WWEP031)  
Gail Kim (studio shot) (WWEP032)  
The Rock (doing Sharpshooter) (WWEP033)  
Undertaker (black vest) (WWEP034)  
Undertaker (falling on John Cena) (WWEP035)

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Lita (in net shirt) (WWEP006)  
Tajiri (spitting at Kidman) (WWEP0065)  
The Rock (arm raised) (WWEP0060)  
Stacy Keibler (black outfit) (WWEP0061)  
Chris Benoit (doing Crossface) (WWEP0062)  
Big Show (doing chokeslam) (WWEP0063)  
John Cena (holding U.S. belt) (WWEP091)  
Undertaker (WrestleMania XX) (WWEP093)  
Stacy Keibler (Bra & Panties Match) (WWEP096)  
John Cena (studio) (WWEP097)  
Rikishi & Scotty 2 Hotty (WWEP094)  
Miss Jackie (cheerleader) (WWEP095)  
Kurt Angle (studio) (WWEP090)  
Eddie Guerrero (holding belt) (WWEP092)  
Rob Van Dam (studio) (WWEP087)  
Goldberg (pressing Randy Orton) (WWEP036)  
John Cena (slamming Undertaker) (WWEP037)  
Brock Lesnar (giving Kurt Angle F-5) (WWEP038)  
Goldberg (attacking Randy Orton) (WWEP039)  
Scott Steiner (studio shot) (WWEP040)  
Trish Stratus (studio shot) (WWEP041)  
Triple H (Pedigreeing The Hurricane) (WWEP042)  
Kane (slamming Shane McMahon) (WWEP043)  
Eugene (studio shot) (WWEP105)

### Pendants, Dog Tags, and Key Chains

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Undisputed Championship Belt key chain (WWEKC008)  
Triple H logo key chain (WWEKC014)  
Trish Stratus logo key chain (WWEKC011)  
Shawn Michaels HBK key chain (WWEKC013)  
Matt Hardy V1 key chain (WWEKC015)  
Goldust face key chain (WWEKC017)  
Goldberg logo key chain (WWEKC018)  
Raw World Championship belt key chain (WWEKC019)  
Steve Austin 3:16 skull key chain (WWEKC020)  
Rey Mysterio mask key chain (WWEKC021)  
Undertaker devil face key chain (WWEKC022)  
Brock tattoo logo key chain (WWEKC023)  
Triple H logo key chain (WWEKC024)  
Y2J (Ass Clown) key chain (WWEKC012)  
Stacy Keibler logo key chain (WWEKC010)



#### Pendants

Y2J (Ass Clown) pendant (WWEPENDANT007)  
Kane mask pendant (WWEPENDANT011)  
Stacy Keibler pendant (WWEPENDANT005)  
Steve Austin (What?) pendant (WWEPENDANT009)  
Trish Stratus logo pendant (WWEPENDANT006)  
Undertaker devil head pendant (WWEPENDANT010)  
Triple H logo pendant (WWEPENDANT013)  
Shawn Michaels HBK pendant (WWEPENDANT008)  
Matt Hardy V1 pendant (WWEPENDANT012)  
Goldust face pendant (WWEPENDANT015)  
Goldberg pendant (WWEPENDANT016)  
Rey Mysterio 619 logo pendant (WWEPENDANT017)  
Steve Austin 3:16 skull pendant (WWEPENDANT018)  
Rey Mysterio mask pendant (WWEPENDANT019)  
Brock Lesnar tattoo logo pendant (WWEPENDANT020)  
Triple H logo pendant (WWEPENDANT022)  
Undertaker devil face 2 pendant (WWEPENDANT021)  
John Cena (Word Life) (WWEPENDANT025)

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Undertaker Belt (WWEBELT06)  
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# no holds barred

With Will Welsh

**I** SERVED IN the United States Marine Corps from 1990 through 1995. I was only 17 when I stepped onto the plane that would take me to South Carolina for boot camp at Parris Island. I was scared and excited at the same time.

Before arrival, I thought I knew what I was getting

myself into, but until you have a man who is five inches taller and 40 pounds heavier than you screaming in your face and forcing you to do triangle pushups in the sweltering heat of a South Carolina summer, you have no idea of the world of hurt you're about to enter. However, after three months of in-your-face, hardcore training, I emerged as a 17-year-old U.S. Marine.

Yes, I was still 17, which means that I couldn't legally drink or even legally vote, but I could legally die for my country.

How weird that strikes me today.

Shortly after graduating from boot camp, I went to Tennessee for schooling in avionics. Only a few months after my arrival, the United States led a coalition of nations against Saddam Hussein. Senior officers were telling us in the schools to prepare for immediate withdrawal from school and deployment overseas. They said that the order could come at any time, and we needed to be ready.

I was scared to death.

Luckily for me, that never happened. The Gulf War ended before it ever really began. I finished out my schooling and my five years in the Marine Corps without ever having to fire a round in anger or dodge a round heading in my direction. The only sand I saw came provided by the island of Okinawa and the beautiful California coastline.

I never realized just how lucky I was until our invasion of Iraq.

Most of the friends I made in the Marines were like me. They did their time and then got out. However, I had plenty of acquaintances that were planning to make the Marine Corps their lifelong career. Their goal was to spend 20 to 30 years in the Marines and then get out with a full government pension.

Today, I wonder how many Marines I knew—even if I can no longer remember their names—have died in Iraq. I'd like to think that none of the people I spent time with in the Marines has been killed, but that's probably wishful thinking. Considering the number of casualties over there, some probably have. I can only hope that if that's the case, they went as peacefully as possible and with the knowledge that everyone over here greatly appreciates and deeply respects their sacrifices.

Of course, not everyone in the United States does deeply respect the sacrifice of the men and women who are currently fighting overseas. Vince McMahon says he does, but he doesn't. If he did, he wouldn't



Muhammad Hassan and his manager, Khosrow Daivari, are not claiming to be terrorists on WWE TV, but when Hassan says he might lead a revolt against the U.S. if they and other Arab-Americans aren't treated better, that's the implication. Will Welsh considers this the worst kind of exploitation.



be kicking off what might very well turn out to be the most controversial storyline in WWE history.

The debut of Muhammad Hassan and Khosrow Daivari has been an outright embarrassment to the wrestling community. Their storyline is the kind of fodder that allows mainstream media organizations to pick apart wrestling as the low-brow, uncultured form of entertainment they always say it is—and this time it's impossible to argue with them.

Hassan and Daivari aren't terrorists, Iraqi nationals, or even al Qaeda sympathizers. Instead, they're Arab-Americans who feel that they've been wronged in the aftermath of 9/11 and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. They say they—and other Arab-Americans they know—have been treated differently in recent years, and that they're tired of it.

What's wrong with that? Nothing. If the U.S. suddenly went to war with Wales and people started isolating and treating people with the last name of "Welsh" differently, I'd be upset too. It's an easy argument to understand—and even sympathize with.

Of course, WWE matchmakers, sensing that they needed to do something to make these two stronger heels, pushed the envelope even further. So, in a promo designed to inflame WWE's core white, Anglo-Saxon audience, Hassan stated that he's prepared to lead a revolt against this country if things don't change.

In other words, what Hassan did in that promo was make a veiled reference to terrorism.

I'm disgusted by it. I hope everyone reading this column is too. What WWE is trying to do is create really, really cheap heat by appealing to the lowest common denominator. It's disrespectful to everyone who lost his or her life on 9/11 and to everyone who has served—and died—in Afghanistan and Iraq since then. It's disrespectful to the Arab-American minority, and it's disrespectful to Arabs worldwide.

Heck, it's disrespectful to those of us who have a brain.

Here's WWE's take on the storyline, courtesy of [www.wweparents.com](http://www.wweparents.com):

"WWE is introducing two new Arab-American characters on *Monday Night Raw*. Muhammad Hassan and Khosrow Daivari are U.S. citizens who have grown up in America. They love their country. However, they now



Val Venis and whatever other WWE stars hand out beatings to Hassan will surely hear a lot of cheers from WWE crowds. They won't hear any from a certain former Marine.

face a new and different kind of relationship with their fellow U.S. citizens as a result of being Arab-American in a United States still struggling with the tragic events of September 11, 2001. *Raw* will explore the challenges Hassan and Daivari face as Hassan tries to make his mark as a new WWE superstar under the guidance of Daivari as his manager."

Note that WWE doesn't mention the veiled threat of terrorism. It can't and it won't. To do so would validate everything the critics of the storyline have to say. Instead, this is WWE's attempt at playing down what it is attempting to do with these two wrestlers: make money off of racism.

WWE has done this before, but it's never done so in such a blatant manner. Not even Sgt. Slaughter's transformation from ultrapatriotic American to American turncoat during the Gulf War was this controversial. That storyline only created bad feelings toward one person, Slaughter. WWE's currently storyline is creating extremely dangerous, untoward feelings for an entire American cultural group—feelings that have the possibility to ignite ugly scenes outside of WWE shows as soon as they end.

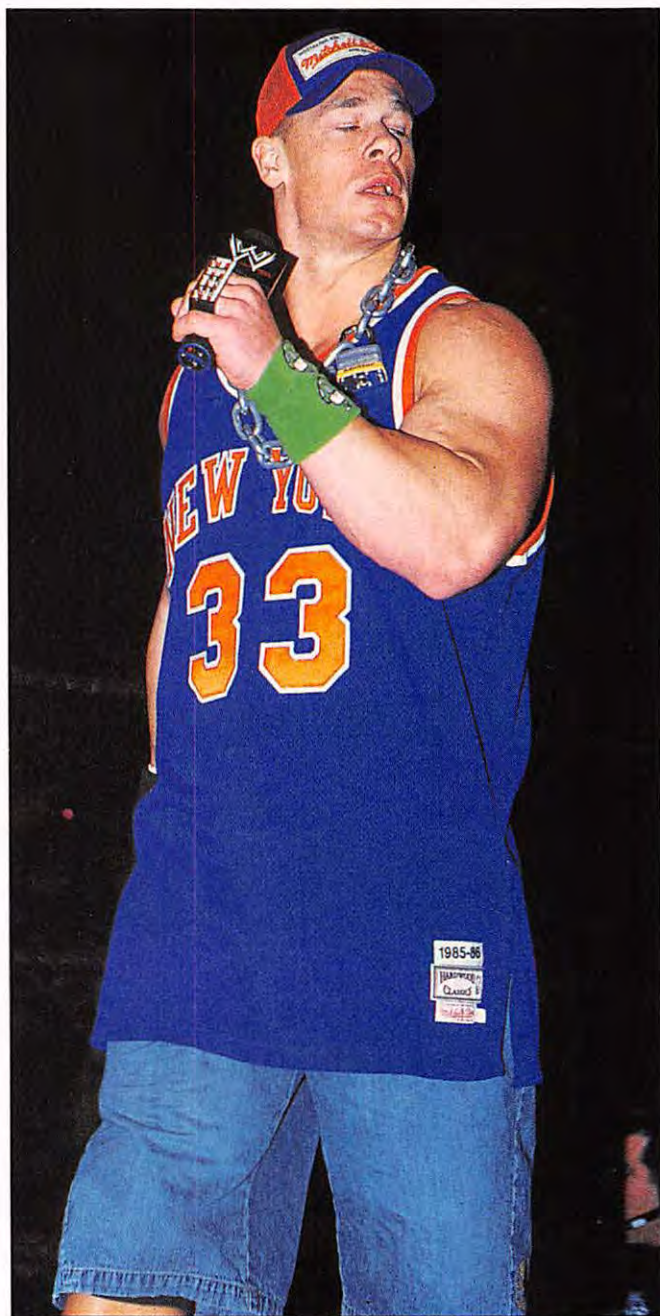
At the age of 17, I was ready to die for my country. As Vince McMahon nears the age of 60, he might not be ready to die for his country, but he sure as heck is ready to exploit it. □



# blindsided

By Harry Burkett

**J**OHN CENA GOT into a fight in an after-hours nightclub following the October 5 *Smackdown* taping in Boston. Perhaps too cocky on his home turf, the WWE superstar mixed it up with the wrong crowd, was



John Cena got thousands of get-well wishes via [wwe.com](http://wwe.com) after he was, *um*, stabbed in an altercation in a nightclub. A lot of kids were no doubt upset by the news. Harry Burkett was upset, too, but not by anything that actually happened to Cena.

stabbed in several places, and suffered a serious puncture wound to his kidney. It looked as if Cena, the up-and-comer who was destined to become *Smackdown*'s franchise player, might need a kidney transplant.

As much as WWE wanted to protect Cena's privacy, Jim Ross—probably wanting to get ahead of the Internet rumors—acknowledged on the air that Cena had sustained injuries in a nightclub brawl. At the *Smackdown* taping held the following night, General Manager Theodore Long said the incident had been mentioned on *Raw* without his consent. Nevertheless, Long addressed the matter honestly and directly with the locker room and all WWE fans. Long acknowledged Cena had been involved in a fight and a stabbing, and it was unknown when—or if—he could ever return to the ring.

To their credit, Michael Cole and Tazz immediately squelched our worst fears, insisting that while Cena's injuries were serious, they were not life-threatening. Long, Cole, and Tazz said their hearts and prayers were with Cena, but that *Smackdown* would continue without him.

Thank goodness WWE took the high road. At a time when NBA players are brawling with basketball fans, melees are breaking out at college football games, and desperate housewives are dropping their bath towels and jumping into the arms of NFL players, WWE could have tried to hide the incident. But, no, at a time when moral issues were the deciding factor in a presidential election, WWE openly admitted that one of its top superstars was involved in something as unsavory as a bar-room stabbing. Moreover, WWE was willing to sacrifice ratings points in order to be straightforward with its fans. By acknowledging Cena's condition and his subsequent hiatus, WWE knowingly gave viewers one less reason to watch *Smackdown* on Thursday nights.

I was particularly touched when Michael Cole and Tazz informed fans they could log on to [wwe.com](http://wwe.com) and send Cena their get-well messages. I was tempted to send "The Doctor Of Thuganomics" a message of my own. Instead of e-mailing my condolences and words of encouragement through [wwe.com](http://wwe.com), I've decided to share my message with all of you—and it comes straight from the heart.

Here it is: John Cena, Vince McMahon, Jim Ross, Theodore Long, Michael Cole, and Tazz, all of you should be ashamed of yourselves! How dare you tell us that John Cena was stabbed in a nightclub when he's been looking pretty healthy to everyone on the set of his upcoming movie, *The Marine*! John Cena, don't you feel the least bit guilty about the emotional hardship you've caused the thousands of kids who wiped their tears aside to share



their innermost thoughts and feelings with you at [wwe.com](http://wwe.com)? What do you think of all those children who stayed up past their bedtimes to send heartfelt messages that you're probably never going to read?

Obviously, no one in WWE cares. And it became apparent this was just another wrestling angle when Theodore Long accused U.S. champion Carlito Caribbean Cool and his bodyguard, Jesus, of being involved in Cena's stabbing. Did the WWE powers-that-be ever stop to think about the many fans, particularly the younger ones, who would feel used and betrayed by the whole nightclub/stabbing cover story?

Exploitation. It's a tricky concept that can lead to great ratings and buy rates ... or can flop miserably and hurt a wrestling company's credibility. Wait a minute, I know what you're think-

ing. How can I possibly use the terms "wrestling" and "credibility" in the same sentence? Isn't that a contradiction?

Not really—and this is a concept that only wrestling fans can understand. Don't ever try to explain it to an outsider with a skeptical view of wrestling, because they will never, ever get it. WWE does have a bond of trust with its fans—and I think it shattered that trust with the supposed John Cena stabbing.

Cena had to reduce his schedule with Smackdown so he could travel to Australia to work on his WWE-produced movie, which is slated for release in 2005. So Creative had to cover for his absence. Fine. Someone decided that Cena had been stabbed in a nightclub. Perhaps it was meant to be a takeoff on a real-life incident involving Shawn Michaels nearly a decade ago, but I like it. The announcers went so far as to say that Cena's kidney was punctured, and that he might need a transplant. Edgy, gritty, and real—I like it even more.

Then Cole and Tazz encouraged fans to log on to [wwe.com](http://wwe.com) to send their get-well messages. Stop! I call a foul!

Now, fans, I think we have come upon the new invisible line in wrestling. When I tune in to *Smackdown* at 8:00 on Thursday night, I want it to be tough, realistic, and, yes, exploitive all the way until 10:00. Almost anything should be fair game. Does Chavo Guerrero Jr. want to mock his uncle for being a former drug addict? Does Rob Van Dam want to blame Paul Heyman for running ECW out of business? Does Linda McMahon want to call Vince a two-timing scoundrel? Go for it! Blurring reality and fantasy is what separates wrestling from *Monday*



Jesus, the bodyguard for Carlito Caribbean Cool, was left to take up his man's feud with Cena for him after Carlito suffered a separated shoulder. Burkett thinks Triple-C deserves our get-well wishes more than Cena did. But there was no e-mail address set up for him by WWE.

*Night Football* and *The Bold & The Beautiful*.

But WWE telling fans to send Cena get-well messages via [wwe.com](http://wwe.com) went too far. Fans want to be entertained by wrestling, but they don't want to be told lies. I don't have a problem with storylines being advanced on [wwe.com](http://wwe.com), but the site shouldn't be used to make something like this more convincing. It reminds me of an incident in which Andre the Giant brutally attacked Hulk Hogan in the mid-1980s. Vince McMahon gave a mailing address on *Superstars Of Wrestling*, encouraging viewers to send Hogan their get-well wishes. A friend of mine sent Hogan a postcard. Two weeks later, he received the WWF Christmas Catalog. Even as a young teenager, my friend was able to figure out the real reason behind the pitch. He felt the WWF had lied to him.

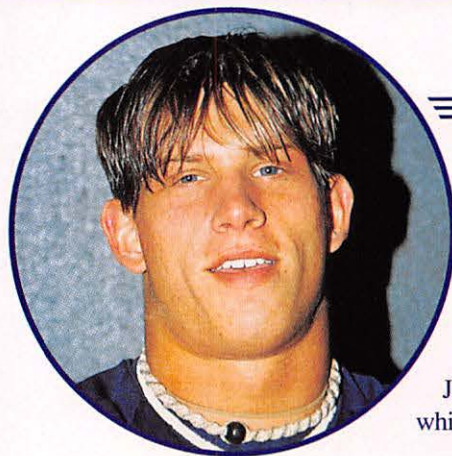
Shawn Michaels and Bret Hart exploiting their real-life rivalry was good. Jerry Lawler using his "Owen Hart voice" to sell a storyline injury on *Raw* was bad. DeGeneration X playing off the WWF's behind-the-scenes Kliq was good. Hulk Hogan injuring Richard Belzer with a headlock just to prove wrestling was real, well, that was really bad.

Before we went to press, John Cena made his surprise return to Smackdown, challenged Carlito Caribbean Cool, and regained his U.S. title. Cena attacked Carlito mercilessly, and I'm sure Cena will get the blame—or credit—for Carlito being on the disabled list for the next several months. As it turns out, Carlito has a legit separated shoulder suffered in a house show match with Hardcore Holly, and Cena's attack on him will no doubt be the cover story.

So let's send our sympathies to someone who deserves them. Get well soon, Carlito. □

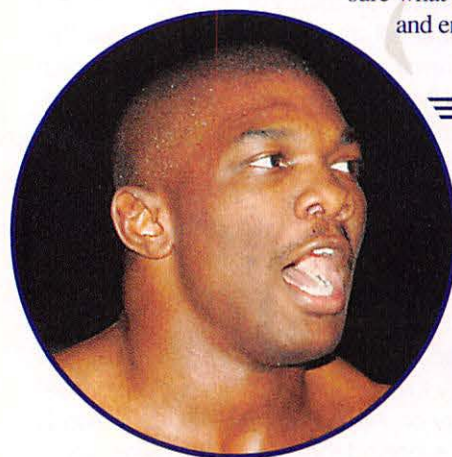
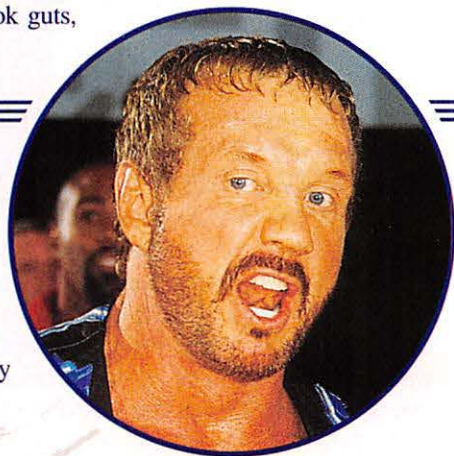


# thumbs up



*Thumbs Up* to Josh Matthews. Matthews, a former *Tough Enough* finalist, never should have never gotten himself involved in Booker T's feud with John Bradshaw Layfield and Orlando Jordan. He should have followed journalism's (he is a journalist, right?) number-one rule: Report the news; don't make it. However, we'll give Matthews a pass on this one. He was forced into action, and instead of backing down like a scared sissy the way so many backstage interviewers do (see Jonathan Coachman), he pushed back. That took guts, which is why we're saluting him.

*Thumbs Up* to "Diamond" Dallas Page. It must be hard to come out of retirement and immediately begin a rigorous in-ring schedule when you're approaching the age of 50—but that's exactly what DDP has done since debuting for TNA this fall. Page, who, save for a handful of matches, had been out of the ring since spinal injuries forced his departure from WWE in November 2002, has returned to the sport to feud with his long-time rival Raven. He got into Raven's head early and often, and although we're still not sure what he meant when he said, "Rent's due," his energy and enthusiasm have been surprisingly refreshing.



*Thumbs Up* to Shelton Benjamin. Who knew when Shelton Benjamin was teaming with Charlie Haas for Smackdown that he'd turn into one of the most upstanding and respectable wrestlers in either of WWE's locker rooms? Benjamin's change of heart—plus his success as a singles wrestler—has really put him in Raw's spotlight as one of the brand's future top stars. His run as Intercontinental champion has been enjoyable to watch, and we've really liked watching him foil Christian's attempts at reclaiming the belt. It looks like nothing will hold him back.

*Thumbs Up* to C.M. Punk. One of the most intriguing feuds in Ring of Honor in 2004 saw Punk acting like a punk as he got in the face of former NWA World champion Rick Steamboat. Repeatedly. We ripped Punk and begged "The Dragon" to come out of retirement and show Punk the error of his ways. It never came to that. Punk finally came around to Steamboat's way of thinking and became his ally. Since then, he has been one of ROH champ Samoa Joe's toughest challengers. As of press time, he had held Joe to two 60-minute draws. We wouldn't be surprised to see that ROH belt around Punk's waist soon.

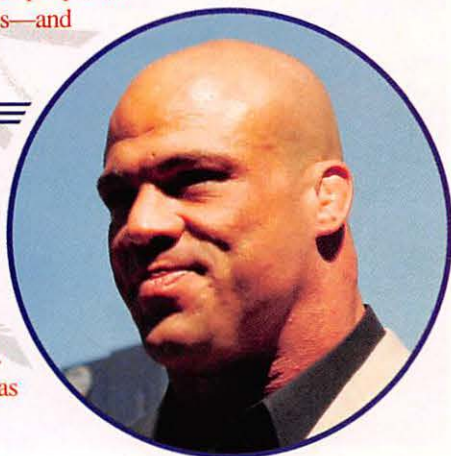




# thumbs down

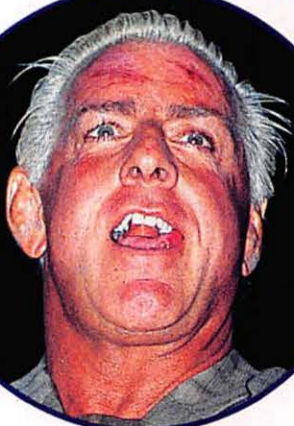


**Thumbs Down** to Simon Dean. If you're overweight, is it a good idea to try to shed some unwanted pounds and work yourself into better physical condition? You bet it is. Not only do you reap the physical rewards, losing weight also improves your self-esteem. However, we can't stand Simon Dean's approach to losing weight. His products might work—although we're betting they don't—but he's trying to bully people into buying his stuff by humiliating overweight people on live TV. He's crude, obnoxious, and malicious—and one of the ugliest people we've ever seen.



**Thumbs Down** to Kurt Angle. Angle is one of the most talented wrestlers to ever set foot inside a professional wrestling ring. His expertise inside the ring is second to none. However, we appreciated the way *Tough Enough* competitor Daniel Puder, who comes from the world of mixed martial arts, put a scare into Angle when Angle challenged the *Tough Enough* contestants to wrestle him this fall. Puder quickly accepted, and even though WWE put its own spin on the situation when it aired on TV, he really did have Angle on the defensive before getting pinned.

Angle quickly learned that, yes, there is such a thing as being too cocky.



**Thumbs Down** to Ric Flair. Randy Orton has spelled it out to him. He's made it perfectly clear: Flair is nothing more than Triple-H's lap dog right now. Orton showed him the light, gave him an opportunity to come clean and recapture the glory that should and could still be his, and Flair did nothing but shove that opportunity back down Orton's throat. He refused Orton's attempt at a truce, instead choosing to remain at Triple-H's side. In doing so, he showed a real cowardice. How great it could have been to see him confront the creepy, slimy shadow of his former self that he has become.



**Thumbs Down** to Kevin Nash. Well, we knew Nash would eventually start to manipulate the TNA locker room—we just didn't realize that he'd begin to do it so early in his career with the promotion. He's already creating backstage mayhem by cutting unscripted promos, and with his Kings of Wrestling partner Scott Hall, they're already dominating TNA programming. Jeff Hardy had a real shot of wresting the NWA heavyweight championship away from Jeff Jarrett at Victory Road—until Nash and Hall got themselves involved anyway. Too bad.



# correspondents reports



A steel ladder proved to be an effective weapon for NWA champ Jeff Jarrett against Jeff Hardy in their ladder match at Victory Road. Scott Hall and Kevin Nash proved to be even more effective.

## **Orlando, FL: TNA Victory Road** **Correspondent: Jack Chetney**

Jeff Jarrett defending his NWA championship against Jeff Hardy in a ladder match is the match that most of those ordering Victory Road wanted to see. It was the marquee match of the night, and it was made even more intriguing by the fact that Scott Hall and Kevin Nash were inside the arena and promised to get involved.

Hardy took the match to the champion early, rushing Jarrett and quickly throwing him into a pair of ladders. He then scaled one of the ladders and came off the top with a scintillating dropkick that connected with Jarrett's face. With the champion dazed, Hardy squeezed Jarrett in between the legs of a ladder, putting a lot of pressure on the champion's sternum. Afterward, Hardy tried scaling another ladder to reach the belt suspended above the ring, but Jarrett recovered enough to keep him from recovering the gold.

For a short time, Jarrett had the momentum, but Hardy fought back with a top-rope swanton bomb that left the champion gasping for air. Hardy, sensing his chance, once again set up the ladder in the middle of the ring and

started climbing it, but Hall came down to ringside, climbed in the ring, and stopped Hardy's ascent by planting him into the mat with a Razor's edge.

Even though security quickly escorted Hall out of the ring, he continued to involve himself in the match, forcing Hardy to basically wrestle the bout as a handicap match. Somehow, he maintained the advantage, nearly winning on a couple of occasions. However, once Nash made his first appearance, Hardy's fate was sealed.

"Big Sexy" strolled down to ringside carrying two guitars. He handed one to Hall, and they both clocked Hardy over the head with them, knocking the high-flyer loopy. Jarrett added a third guitar shot, which sent Hardy straight to the mat. Jarrett quickly set up a ladder and grabbed the belt to retain his championship.

In other bouts: Hector Garza won a 20-man battle royal, last eliminating Frankie Kazarian ... Johnny B. Badd, Ron Killings, Erik Watts, & Pat Kenney defeated The Naturals, Kid Kash, & Dallas ... Mascarita Sagrada pinned Piratita Morgan ... B.G. James & Konnan defeated NWA tag team champions Bobby Rude & Eric Young to win the title ... Trinity beat Jacquelyn ... Monty Brown beat Raven and Abyss in a triple threat match ... TNA X champion Petey Williams beat A.J. Styles ... James Storm & Chris Harris beat Christopher Daniels & Elix Skipper in a last-team-standing match.

## **Cleveland, OH: WWE Survivor Series** **Correspondent: Jamie Locke**

Entering this match for the Smackdown title, defending champ John Bradshaw Layfield had surprised the entire wrestling community with his long, effective championship



reign. However, Booker T—having yet to achieve the kind of success in WWE that he achieved in WCW—was desperate for a world championship win.

The match started off with some intense back-and-forth action. It was easy to see that both JBL and Booker T felt they had something to prove against the other. After the first few minutes, the match spilled to the outside, where JBL—with the help of Orlando Jordan—took charge. JBL threw Booker T onto the announcers' table and watched as Jordan suckerpunched Booker T with a devastating clothesline.

Back in the ring, JBL maintained control with a cobra clutch and then a sleeperhold. Booker looked like he was ready to pass out as a result of insufficient blood flow to the brain, but he pulled adrenaline from deep within his body and elbowed his way out. Layfield tried to stay one step ahead of Booker by throwing him in Jordan's direction, but Booker took out Jordan with a superkick.

Booker maintained control over the next few minutes and came close to winning the championship after nailing JBL with a top-rope dropkick. Layfield, ever the cagey veteran, broke the subsequent pinfall attempt by grabbing the bottom rope, saving his strength in the process. Shortly thereafter, Jordan interfered again, allowing JBL to drive Booker's head into the mat with a DDT.

Smackdown backstage interviewer Josh Matthews made his way down to ringside to help even the odds, but his attempts to help Booker were ineffective. Still, Booker nearly finished JBL with a scissors kick, but the ref was down when he made the cover. A few minutes later, JBL clocked an unsuspecting Booker with the title belt to gain a horribly tainted win.

In other bouts: Cruiserweight champion Spike Dudley beat Billy Kidman, Rey Misterio Jr., and Chavo Guerrero Jr. in a four-way match ... Intercontinental champion Shelton Benjamin beat Christian ... The Big Show, Eddie Guerrero, Rob Van Dam, & John Cena beat Kurt Angle, Luther Reigns, Mark Jindrak, & Carlito Caribbean Cool in an elimination match ... The Undertaker beat Heidenreich ... Women's champion Trish Stratus beat Lita by disqualification ... Randy Orton, Chris Benoit, Chris Jericho, & Maven beat Triple-H, Edge, Gene Snitsky, & Batista in an elimination match.

### **Highland, IN: IWA Mid-South Correspondent: Jake Reynolds**

Fans of both Ring of Honor and TNA lament the fact that they can't witness some of their favorite wrestlers taking on one another because of legal problems. One match they've been dying to see but haven't been able to yet has been A.J. Styles (who is under contract to TNA) against C.M. Punk (an ROH regular).

Well, thank goodness for IWA Mid-South. Because the promotion is neutral territory, Styles and Punk were allowed to meet in its ring—and with the promotion's heavyweight championship on the line!

Before the match began, Punk indicated that he was ready to take the championship from Styles by smiling when it was announced that their match had been given a

one-hour time limit. He started the match strong by keeping Styles grounded on the mat by working over the champion's arm. Styles, apparently frustrated, tried to catch Punk with an early Styles clash, but Punk smartly blocked the maneuver.

In blocking it, though, Punk left himself open for a kick to the back of the neck. Styles then followed up with a baseball slide that knocked

Punk off the ring apron and to the outside—and when he hit a pescado, a large segment of the audience thought that his defense of his title was going to be successful.

Punk, however, continued to fight back. He sent Styles into the front row with a tope, and then he evaded an attempted clothesline. Styles did connect with a high-impact dropkick, but he landed poorly and came up holding his arm. Sensing opportunity, Punk focused on the injury, first with a hammerlock lariat and then with a hammerlock DDT. Eventually, he locked Styles up for good with his anaconda vise submission hold. Styles tried to resist, but the pain proved too much, so he tapped out, giving Punk the championship.

In other bouts: Trik Davis beat Chandler McClure ... Davey Andrews beat Mike Wallace ... Matt Sydal beat Chris Sabin ... Dusty Rhodes & Ian Rotten beat Chris Candido & Steve Stone ... Women's champion Mercedes Martinez beat Mickie Knuckles by disqualification ... Women's champion Mercedes Martinez and MsChif wrestled to a double-countout ... Anthony Franco & Evan Starsmore beat Shane Hagadorn & Matt Turner ... Lightweight champion Jimmy Jacobs beat J.C. Bailey ... Ryan Boz beat Abyss by disqualification ... Chad Collyer beat Claudio Castagnoli ... Tag team champions The Wildcards beat Homicide & B-Boy ... Danny Daniels beat B.J. Whitmer ... Roderick Strong, Austin Aries, & Nigel McGuinness beat Samoa Joe, Ace Steel & "Spyder" Nate Webb. □



Although C.M. Punk was unable to rearrange A.J. Styles' face at a recent IWA Mid-South show, he was able to beat Styles by submission and take his heavyweight title.

**Send your reports to:  
CORRESPONDENTS EDITOR,  
Box 1148, Ft. Washington, PA 19034**



## WWE CAN USE AN ARAB-AMERICAN ANGLE IF DONE TASTEFULLY

By Dave Lenker

**A**LTHOUGH IT OFTEN sounds like a copout when Vince McMahon says it, I believe a major ingredient in WWE's winning formula is the organization's willingness and ability to mirror society. Because of the 9/11 attacks and the war in Iraq, Arab-American relations are and have been front and foremost in many of our minds for quite some time now.

Ever since the horrific happenings of that fall day more than three years ago, developments in the Arab community and Middle East have dominated the headlines of newspapers, AM talk radio airwaves, as well as cable and national news broadcasts. If the so-called mainstream media can use the topic to sell newspapers and advertising and fill programming slots, why not WWE? Is Vince McMahon supposed to turn a blind eye to the proverbial elephant in the room simply because some believe professional wrestling appeals to those on the lower end of the evolutionary chart?

No. In fact, I would argue that WWE has an obligation to itself, its shareholders, and to the fans to mine some of the most topical social issues of the day for fresh material—especially if they are controversial. Without new fodder, WWE's storylines will become stale, and interest will wane.

However, I don't believe for one moment this obligation gives WWE license to trample the feelings of anyone affected by the state of global affairs, be they soldiers, terror victims' families, or peace-loving Arab-Americans. The developing program involving Muhammad Hassan and Khosrow

Daivari could have succeeded, but only if WWE handled it tactfully.

While Hassan had been plying his trade in OVW for weeks as the despicable Muhammad, I was encouraged by the way WWE introduced the duo to *Raw* viewers.

Instead of presenting two villainous sneaks that spat out anti-Western epitaphs à la The Iron Sheik (although they did chat to each other in their native language), Hassan and Daivari made a *de facto* plea for understanding and tolerance from the fans by stressing what loyal *Americans* they are. Believe it or not, this was a chance to portray them as fan

favorites, to show that they sought to prove to their fellow Americans that they were as patriotic as anyone, even if some in this country discriminate against them. McMahon could have shown them rising above the prejudice.

Was I convinced that WWE would continue this tack? No, I figured it was just a matter of time before the program degenerated into a hysterical mish-mash of hate-inspired jin-



WWE made it clear that Val Venis was the hero and Muhammad Hassan the villain in this match, but Dave Lenker suggests that Hassan could be portrayed in a much more sympathetic light after he was introduced. Well, could have been.

goism. Sure enough, within weeks, Hassan spoke of leading a revolt if he and Daivari weren't treated better. Sadly, I'm ready to call the Hassan and Daivari experiment a failure already. Unless things change, it appears it will be geared toward the fans' basest qualities, vindicating wrestling's haughty critics. But it didn't have to be that way.

**Dave Lenker is the editor-in-chief of *THE WRESTLER*.**



# counterpoint:

## WWE CAN'T HELP BUT PUSH THE ENVELOPE WITH ANY ANGLE

By Frank Krewda

**O**H, BROTHER! IT looks like PC Police have set up their new headquarters in THE WRESTLER's editorial offices. If complaining about Vince McMahon's and WWE's insensitivity has shown me anything, it's that both are at their best when they're producing edgy programming and taking down ivory towers. And if any industry has license to smash taboos—including the sensitive new dynamic of Arab-American relations—it's professional wrestling, led by the industry's chief nose-thumper, McMahon.

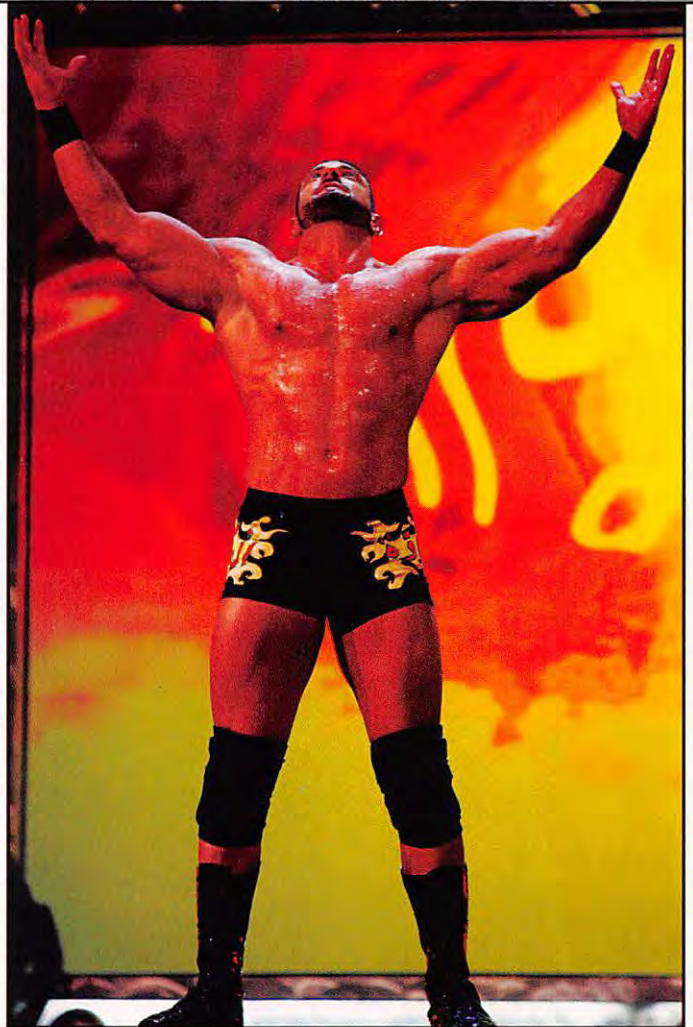
For better or worse, WWE has emerged as the last major American wrestling company standing after all these years by virtue of McMahon's penchant for "crossing the line." Sure, this approach has backfired at times, but not because the high-brows had their sensitivities upset, mainly because vignettes like Mae Young giving birth to a hand or Kane's necrophilia did nothing to advance what happened in the ring.

WWE can trash Hassan and Daivari all it wants to, as far as I'm concerned, but the honor and integrity of the U.S.A., its leaders and its citizens, the feelings of the Coalition soldiers and their families, as well as the victims of 9/11 and their families must be upheld at every turn.

Unlike you, Dave, I wasn't particularly encouraged by Hassan's introductory promo. By having him and Daivari virtually grovel for peace, WWE puts the onus on the fans (and symbolically, all Americans) to accept these two. Let's make no mis-

takes. Hassan and Daivari are here because there are rampant, and at times justifiable, anti-Arab feelings in the air in this country these days. Don't make us look like the bad guys just for being wary of two Middle Easterners. Maybe some will construe this as a sad commentary on our society, but attempts to portray them as fan favorites would have been a waste of time and energy. You might convince a small percentage of fans to sympathize with their plight as Arab-Americans, but others would surely be confused as to how they were supposed to feel about these new characters. And the last thing a promoter wants is to have fans unsure of which way to react to a wrestler.

Appealing to our basest instincts? Has there ever been any other way in WWE? No, I can't see where there has. Restraint and good taste have never been the earmarks of WWE



An Arab-American wrestler who stares skyward in praise of Allah is pretty much guaranteed to get booed in the U.S. Frank Krewda, however, isn't convinced that's the wrong way to go with Hassan and Khosrow Daivari.

programming and they shouldn't be now just because the focal characters look like the enemy. Hedging doesn't work in this case. It's very simple: Either present Hassan and Daivari as the outright enemy and push that envelope, or don't bother incorporating ethnicity into the storyline at all.

**Frank Krewda is a senior writer for THE WRESTLER.**



# introducing:

By Dan Murphy

## FRED SAMPSON



Like so many other young independent wrestlers, Fred Sampson has long dreamed of pursuing a career in WWE. Just two years into his pro career, the New Jersey native has already gotten a chance to live his dream ... sort of

**H**OW'S THIS FOR anxiety: You are an independent wrestler dreaming of someday securing a spot on the WWE roster when you get an invitation to come and hang out backstage at a nearby WWE TV event. You're going to be put on something called the standby list, meaning the company might use you on TV, or it might not use you at all. But you will be paid for your time.

You're that close to the big time, and powerless to do anything about it but show up and hope. So you do exactly what you're told, you help anywhere you can, and you wait for your opportunity. And hope some more. That's guaranteed to raise the old blood pressure into the danger zone.

Fred Sampson is more familiar with the standby list than most. The 6'2", 250-pound Union, New Jersey, native has had the good fortune to be invited to numerous WWE events, and has appeared on WWE TV a few times. Look carefully at the posed picture accompanying this article. Recognize that guy as the police officer who corralled Los Guerreros a while back? How about as one of The Undertaker's WrestleMania XX druids (although he had his face covered by a hood that time)? Or more recently, when he was a security guard—a role he has already played several times—protecting Kurt Angle's gold medal on *Smackdown* during the week of Thanksgiving?

If Sampson looks just a little bit familiar, that is in all likelihood why. And here's a little more about the man they call "The Bonecrusher."

Growing up in New Jersey during the height of the Monday night wars, it was only natural that Sampson



would become a WWF fan. But his father passed down an appreciation of the old school approach.

"My father had old tapes of the NWA and Mid-South territory and he gave them to me," Sampson said. "I watched them all, but the WWF was still really my favorite."

Sampson took up amateur wrestling in high school, where he competed as a heavyweight. After graduation, he enrolled in the training school of the New Jersey-based Independent Wrestling Federation, where he learned the ropes from Roman and Kevin Knight. Around the same time, Sampson discovered bodybuilding and began working off his baby fat and replacing it with muscles of granite.

"In wrestling, you don't want to be built like your average next-door neighbor. You want to look like a monster like the guys you see on TV," Sampson said. "That's not to say you have to be huge with muscles everywhere, but I'm a believer in looking tight and lean. If you want the fans to accept you as an athlete, you have to look like an athlete."

After making his pro debut in the IWF just two years ago, Sampson quickly became one of the company's most popular wrestlers. He defeated Knight to win the IWF heavyweight title and dominated opponents with his Bonecrusher finisher, a running powerslam that utterly flattened his victims. After losing the title, Sampson turned against his fans and joined forces with Knight, who up until that point had been his arch-nemesis. At the same time, the evil Roman turned fan favorite, so Sampson and Roman continued their long feud, even though both had changed ideologies. He has also become a regular with the Delaware-based East Coast Wrestling Association, in which he works closely with Jim Kettner, one of the most respected independent promoters in the Northeast.

Apparently, the WWE scouting staff likes what they see from "The Bonecrusher," and although he has never wrestled a match for the company yet, he has been welcomed backstage.

"Working for WWE, even in the limited capacity I've had so far, has been a great learning experience," Sampson said. "Whenever I can, I talk to the road



It's not all that often that Fred Sampson takes to the air the way he is doing here against Billy Bax. He's more of a power wrestler. "The Bonecrusher" has become a powerful force in both the IWF and the ECWA. And he's gotten face time on WWE TV.

agents, like Arn Anderson, Fit Finlay, and Dean Malenko and ask them for advice. Arn in particular has been great, though I'm sure he wouldn't know me from Adam. I always go to him for advice and talk to him about moves and connecting with the audience, and then I take whatever I learn from Arn back to the IWF, so it has helped me a lot."

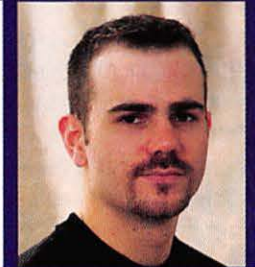
At 21 years old, Sampson has a lot going for him. He's making invaluable contacts in WWE, he's learning from an established and experienced promoter/trainer in Jim Kettner, and he's blessed with the physical size and power to compete against larger opponents. He's also developing acting skills and—perhaps most importantly—patience. One of these days, that patience is bound to pay off in a big way. □



# from bell to bell

By Mike Quackenbush

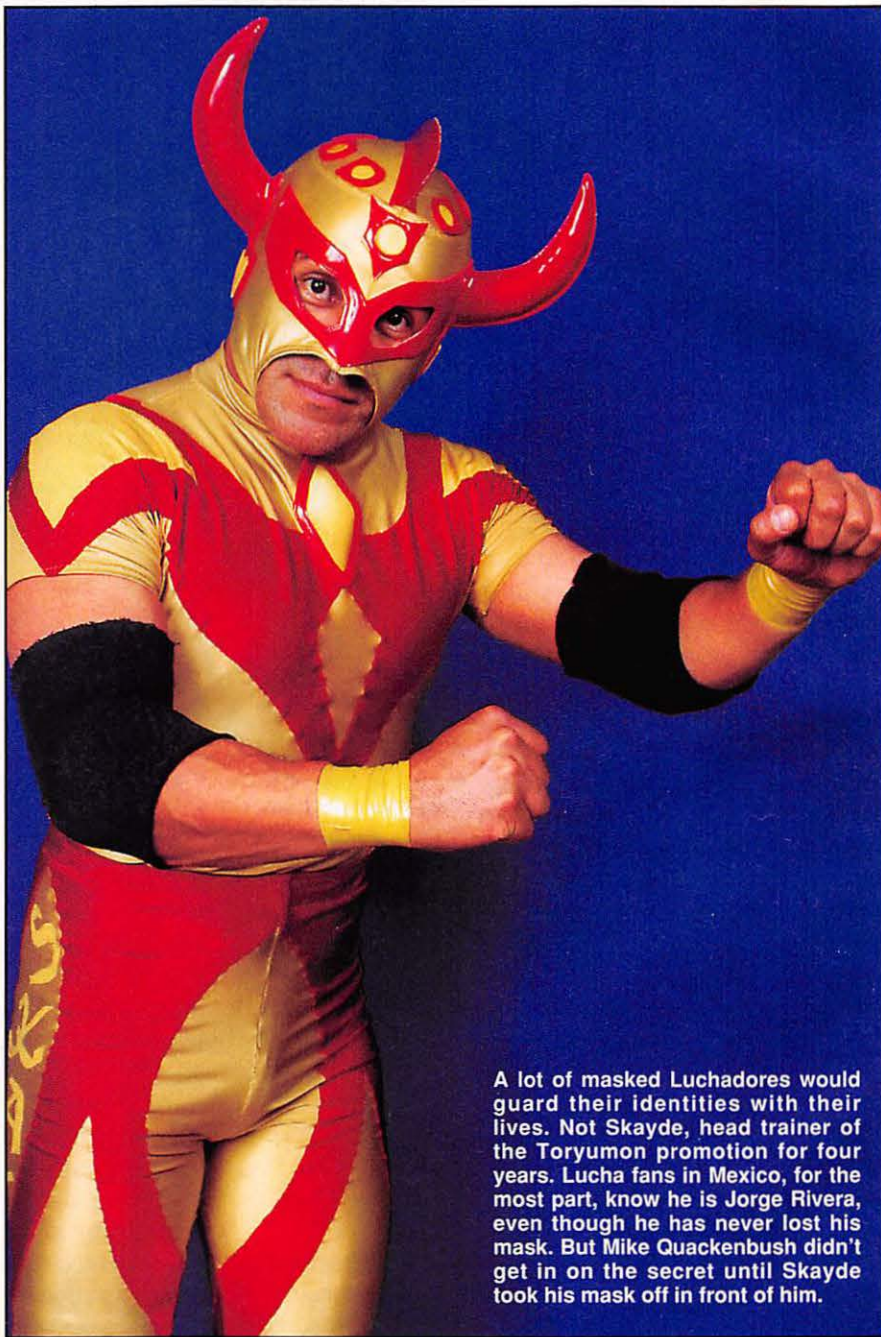
*[Editor's note: Mike Quackenbush, who has held numerous titles in the United States and beyond, files reports on the life of an independent wrestler seeking to make an impact on the business. In this issue, he writes about the strange, yet amazing saga of Skayde, a masked wrestler/trainer whose identity isn't exactly a big secret in Mexico, but was a secret—for a while—to a number of independent wrestlers in the States.]*



**T**HESE LAST THREE weeks have been a surreal experience for me. The man responsible for the strangeness of my days is Jorge Rivera, and as I'm writing this, he's only been gone for a little more than a day, having returned home to Mexico City.

Before the doors of my wrestling school, Chikara Wrestle Factory, opened for business, I spent a lot of time watching tapes from Japan, Mexico, and elsewhere in order to get a more "global sense" of pro wrestling. One particularly curious tape fell into my possession, that of Ultimo Dragon's Toryumon off-shoot called T2P (Toryumon 2000 Project). The in-ring style of the T2P wrestlers was confounding, almost impossible to describe. It was completely unlike anything I had seen before, and upon talking to my wrestling friends who had also seen it, I found that it was unlike anything any of us had seen before.

When the second T2P video was released, I was eager to study it. The transitions, the holds, the escapes—it was almost as if the style had come from another planet. In the middle of their second tape was an odd exhibition match in which an undersized Mexican Luchador outshined everyone on the show with an array of moves I had never seen before. Although the graphics and commentary were in Japanese, the box clearly listed him as "Jorge Rivera." I'd never heard the name before.



A lot of masked Luchadores would guard their identities with their lives. Not Skayde, head trainer of the Toryumon promotion for four years. Lucha fans in Mexico, for the most part, know he is Jorge Rivera, even though he has never lost his mask. But Mike Quackenbush didn't get in on the secret until Skayde took his mask off in front of him.



Fast-forward about 18 months to the summer of 2003. Chikara Wrestle Factory had since graduated three classes of students onto the independent circuit, but in all that time, I had not seen Jorge Rivera again. It seemed as if he came and went in the course of just one match. As the first CHIKARA Tag World Grand Prix drew near, we recruited Skyde, the trainer at the Toryumon Gym in Mexico, to join us for a few days. I hoped that maybe he would be able to help me solve the mystery of Jorge Rivera, and perhaps share with us some of the cutting-edge concepts that made the T2P unique. Skyde, who wears a costume



Working with Skyde at their Chikara Wrestle Factory has been an enriching experience for both Quackenbush and his fellow trainer, Chris Hero. They became students again themselves in trying to pick up the unusual style that Skyde has mastered.

based on that of Japanese superhero UltraMan Taro, had been a regular on the Mexican independent scene for two decades.

You can only imagine my surprise when upon entering my training facility and closing the doors, Skyde pulled off his mask to reveal Jorge Rivera underneath. My brain was going in circles. Why would he compete on a T2P card without his mask? Why was this Luchador so nonchalant about revealing his identity to strangers?

The answers to those questions were not immediately obvious, largely because there wasn't a lot of time for chit-chat. Rivera spent the next two days tying us all in knots and showing us some of the style that is, more or less, his invention. When the weekend and the Tag World Grand Prix tournament were over, many of us wondered if we'd ever see the face of Jorge Rivera again. Fortunately, our eagerness to learn made an impression on the man that has been serving as the head trainer of the Toryumon for the last four years.

Rivera has taught more than a dozen classes at Chikara Wrestle Factory since then, and in that time, I've had the chance to find out a little bit more about him, Skyde, and

his identity crisis. After 18 years as an active wrestler, Jorge's distinct style has made him stand out in Mexico, and his unique in-ring work has basically outed him from his various masked identities, like Boomerang, Super Flecha, and scores of others. While he has never lost his Skyde mask, it is common knowledge in Mexico that Rivera and Skyde are one and the same. When he competes for ENESMA under another name, Destello, he is typically met with chants of "Skyde," showing that Lucha fans are not fooled by any mask. It seemed like everyone was in on the "secret" ... except for us.

This strange revelation is not the reason I've had such a surreal experience over the last few weeks. Following CHIKARA's live events in October, Rivera decided to stay on at Chikara Wrestle Factory and teach for a while, remaining with us through our November schedule. It provided Chris Hero and me a welcome break from teaching each week and gave us an opportunity to learn from a true mat master and innovator.

When we're not training or studying videos, we've had the chance to find out more about Rivera and take him on the road with us to indepen-

dent cards and events around the region. Lucha Libre is a family tradition for Rivera: His brother, Bravo de Norte, is a fellow independent, and Los Brazos, his cousins, have been major stars since the '80s. It's a tradition he takes very seriously, and a vocation he embraces. That dedication is evident every time he slips between the ropes. For those of us that have studied him in the past, it's an odd experience to now learn from him directly. Especially for Chris and I, it's a humbling switch to once again be in the role of student, as so much of what makes up Rivera's unique style is new to us.

In just 12 weeks, Rivera will be back to teach again at Chikara Wrestle Factory, and I'm certainly looking forward to it. To have him training even part-time with us is a learning opportunity that is both intimidating and rare. It's particularly rewarding for those of us that, just two years back, meticulously pored over every minute of his T2P work, wondering who he was and where he came from. Just spending the last three weeks learning under Jorge has been like a Lucha-flavored episode of *The Twilight Zone*: a mind-blowing voyage to the brink of the surreal. □



# Spotlight On...

## JEFF HARDY

**H**E IS ENIGMATIC, he is charismatic, and he is one of the men TNA is banking on to take the promotion to the next level ... Jeff Hardy had the honor of headlining TNA's last weekly Wednesday night pay-per-view card on September 8 in Nashville, its first three-hour Sunday night PPV, Victory Road, on November 7 in Orlando, Florida, and a special card that aired on Fox Sports Net's *Best Damn Sports Show Period*. Unfortunately for Hardy, NWA heavyweight champion Jeff Jarrett came out on top in all three of those contests, a standard match, a ladder match, and a cage match, respectively. But it was never easy for him ... Now Hardy is looking for yet another rematch and bracing for battle against Jarrett and TNA's two other self-proclaimed Kings of Wrestling, Scott Hall and Kevin Nash.

Jeffrey Nero Hardy was born on August 31, 1977, in Cameron, North Carolina ... Inspired by the success of Shawn Michaels and others of his size, began training for a wrestling career when he was in his mid-teens ... Honed his trademark high-risk daredevil style competing in makeshift rings and tiny venues throughout the Carolinas ... A long-time comic book fan, Hardy developed a masked alter-ego named Will o' the Wisp based on a little-known Marvel Comics villain ... In March 1995, Hardy (as Wisp) defeated his brother, Matt (who was competing as High Voltage at the time), for the NFWA title in Robbins, North Carolina ... Wisp became one of the top stars in OMEGA (Organization of Modern Extreme Grappling Arts) Pro Wrestling and won that promotion's new frontier championship in August 1997 ... The brothers continued their rivalry, with Jeff beating Matt (then wrestling as Surge) for the NDW light heavyweight title in February 1998 ... But when the brothers weren't feuding under their

alter-egos, they were establishing themselves as a formidable and exciting tag team ... Won the NWA 2000 tag title in March 1998, beating the more experienced tandem of C.W. and Pat Anderson ... Embarked upon their first tour of Japan that summer, with Wisp beating Ikuto Hidaka for the UWA middleweight title in one highlight ... Returned to OMEGA Pro, where they captured that promotion's tag title, following that tour.

The Hardys' high-flying, high-risk antics and innovative tag style caught the eyes of WWF talent scouts, and the brothers were invited to participate in the WWF's "Funkin' Dojo" camp in 1998, where they trained under former NWA World heavyweight champion Dory Funk Jr. ... Briefly competed in the WWF under ornate, Lucha Libre-style hoods as The Jynx Brothers, and were used as preliminary talent ... After just a few TV appearances under hoods, Matt and Jeff began wrestling under their given names, but the change didn't help their win-loss record all that much ... Not at first, anyway ... Scored an upset win over Kai-entai's Men's Teoh and Sho Funaki on *Sunday Night Heat* in September 1998 ... Legendary tag team wrestler and former Fabulous Freebird Michael Hayes was impressed with the brothers and took them under his wing, giving them a Freebird-style makeover along the way.

Both Hardys wrestled at the 1999 ECWA Super 8 Tournament, with Jeff losing in the quarterfinals to Devon Storm, and Matt beating Christian York in the opening round and then fall-

ing to Christopher Daniels in the semifinals ... Jeff and Matt scored their biggest win to date by prevailing over Edge and Christian at the 1999 King of the Ring pay-per-view ... Two days later, on June 29, the brothers upset The Acolytes—Faarooq and Bradshaw—to win the World tag team title ... Bradshaw and



April 1995: Yes, that was Hardy when he transformed himself into his alter-ego, Will o' the Wisp, during his days in the Carolina independents. He dug out the getup for his one and only Ring of Honor appearance in 2003.









March 1998: Hardy was a daredevil long before he made his mark in WWE. The target of his breath-taking aerial attack here is Richard Slinger.

Faarooq regained the title the following month, while the Hardys parted ways with Hayes ... Briefly aligned with Gangrel as part of The New Brood and continued feuding with Edge and Christian ... That feud went to a higher level when the two teams faced each



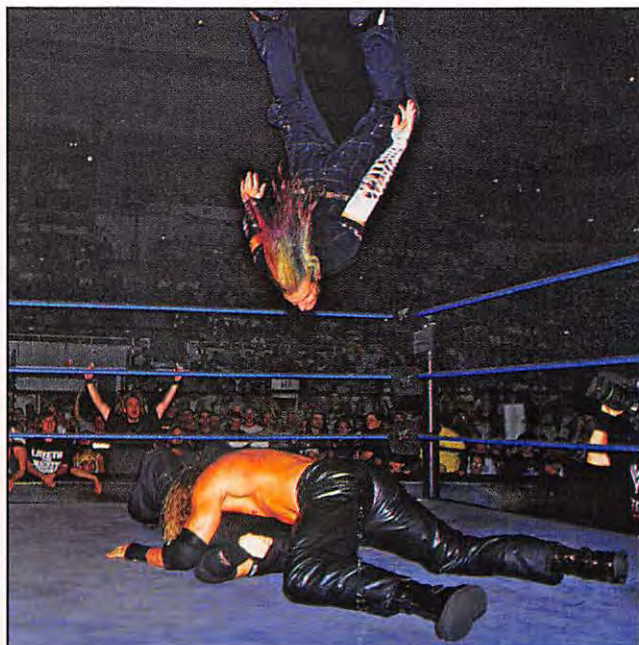
March 1999: The Boyz from Cameron wore some pretty silly-looking tights early on in their WWE careers. But they worked well together nonetheless, taking care of other rising tag teams such as Too Cool.

other in a spectacular best-of-five series, organized by Terri Runnels, with the winning team securing the managerial services of "The Horny Little She-Devil" ... Hardys won the deciding bout in the \$100,000 Terri Invitational Tournament, a thrilling ladder match, at No Mercy in October 1999 ... With his spectacular swanton bomb finisher and rock star looks, Jeff was pegged by many observers as the breakout sensation of the team, occasionally drawing comparisons to Michaels ... Received a rare WWF singles bout on *Raw* in January 2000, beating Al Snow inside a steel cage ... The Hardys beat another "brother" tag team—The Dudley Boyz—in a table match at the 2000 Royal Rumble as part of a tremendously exciting feud.

The following month, Terri turned against her team, and they took on long-time friend Lita as their new manager ... The association with Lita was a breakout move for all involved ... Collectively dubbed Team Extreme, they became one of the most beloved factions in WWE ... Faced off against those damn Dudleys and Edge and Christian in an epic ladder match at WrestleMania XVI in April 2000 ... The bout, won by

Edge and Christian, was voted Match of the Year by readers of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* ... Edge and Christian also won a rematch at SummerSlam (PWI's second runner-up for Match of the Year), that three-way being a tables, ladders, and chairs match ... At Unforgiven 2000 in September, the Hardys regained the WWF tag title with a win over Edge and Christian in a cage match ... Lost the belts on October 22 to E & C (dressed as The Conquistadors), but regained them the following night when they outsmarted Edge and Christian and wore the Conquistador suits themselves ... Lost the gold to Right To Censor's Bull Buchanan and The Goodfather in November 2000 ... At the 2000 Survivor Series, Jeff was the sole survivor in a match pitting the Hardys and Dudleys against E & C, The Goodfather, and Bull Buchanan ... The brothers won the World tag title a fourth time on March 5, 2001 ... Again faced the Dudleys and E & C (in what was voted 2001's Match of the Year) at WrestleMania X7.

Jeff's breakout moment as a singles competitor came (or at least appeared to come) on April 10, 2001, when he scored the biggest upset of his career, beating Triple-H for the Intercontinental title at a *Smackdown* taping after Matt interfered ... HHH regained the title just six days later on *Raw*, but it looked like



June 2000: Here's an unorthodox way of breaking up a pinfall attempt against your brother. Jeff ascends to the top rope and delivers a beautiful swanton bomb that would certainly take Test by surprise.





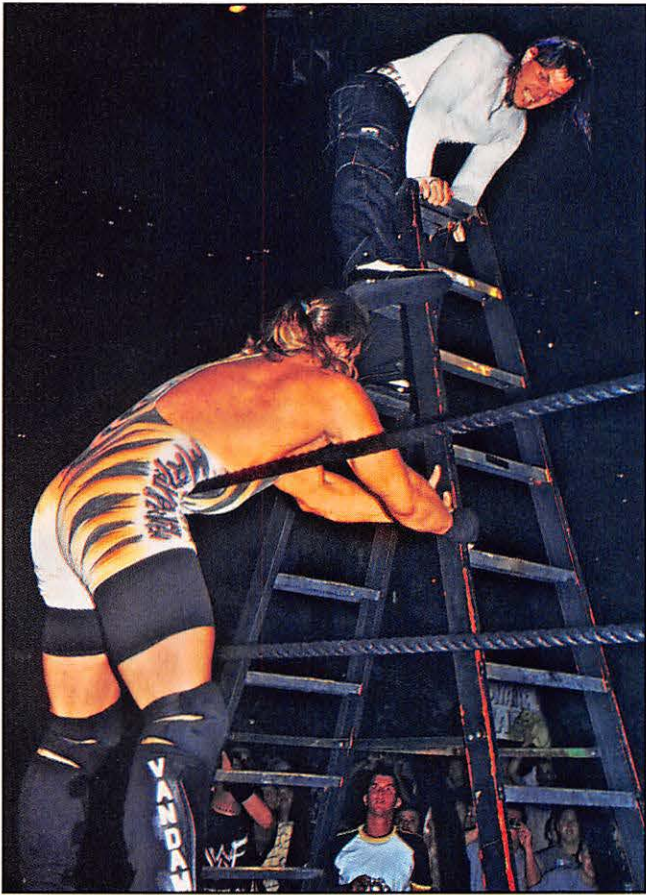
July 2000: Team Extreme in its early days. The Hardys and Lita made for an awesome threesome inside the ring when they were on their games. But executing all those high-risk moves took a toll on all of them.

Jeff had arrived as a singles sensation ... Defeated Jerry Lynn for the light heavy-weight title on June 5 but dropped the championship less than three weeks later to X-Pac ... Bounced back to beat newcomer Mike Awesome, a former ECW World champion, for the hardcore title on July 10 ... Then feuded with Rob Van Dam over that belt, dropping the title to RVD in a ladder match at the Invasion PPV 12 days later ... Won it back from Van Dam on August 13, only to lose it back again six days later at SummerSlam ... The brothers Hardy reunited to win the WCW World tag title from Booker T and Test in October 2001 and won their fifth and final WWF tag title in November.

Tensions soon flared between the brothers stemming from Matt's romantic relationship with Lita, and Matt and Jeff squared off (with Lita as guest referee) at Vengeance in December ... Jeff came out on top in a disappointing showdown ... In July 2002, Jeff beat William Regal to win the European title ... Fought old



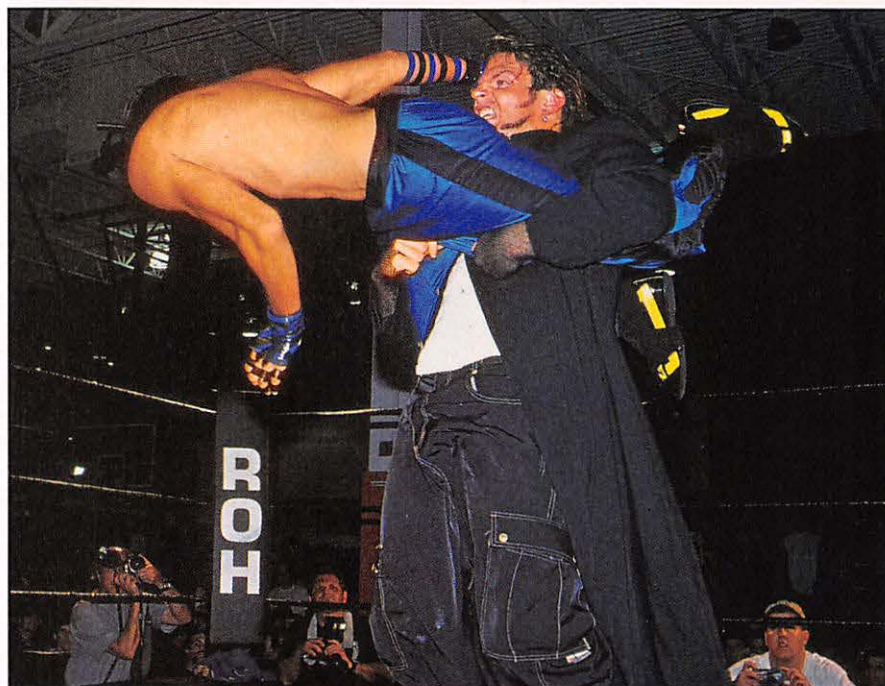
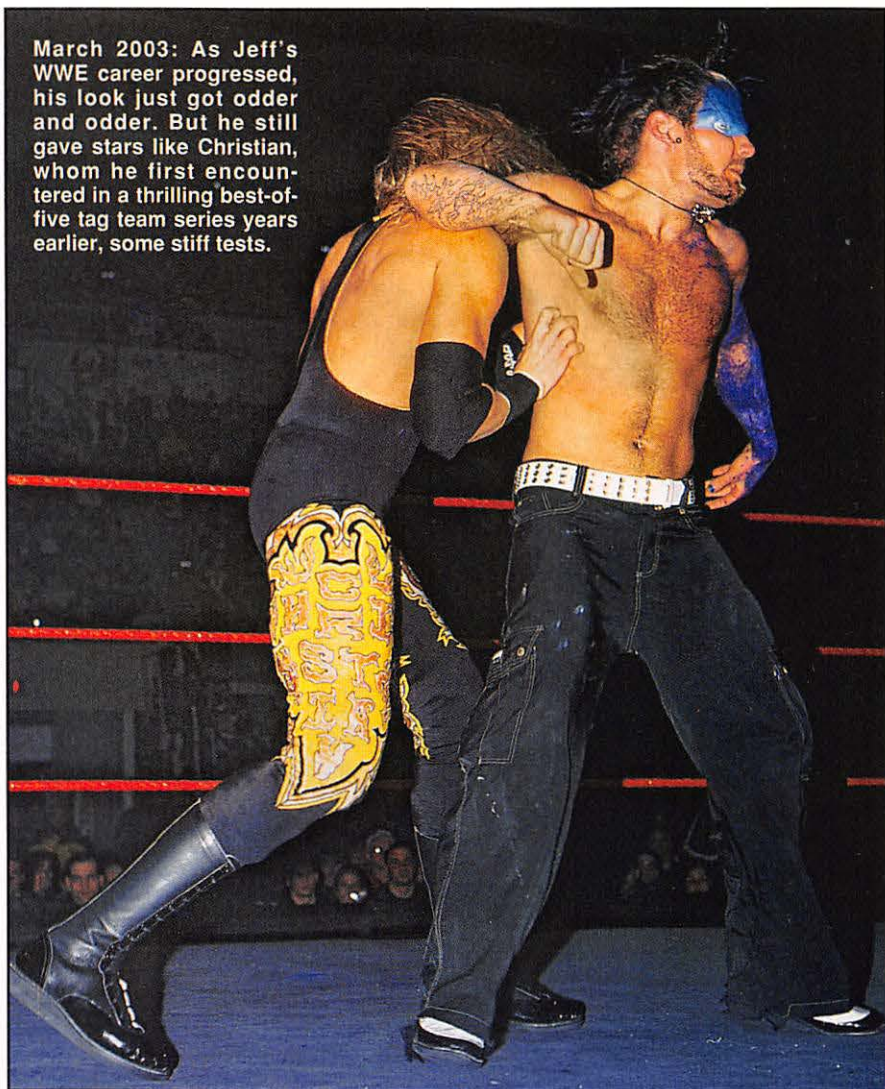
April 2001: Triple-H thought he'd have a fairly easy defense of his Intercontinental title when he took on the much smaller Jeff. He learned the hard way never to underestimate a Hardy. Alas, it wasn't the beginning of a great singles run.



July 2001: Although Rob Van Dam dominated their rivalry, Hardy would undoubtedly agree that he had some of the most exciting matches of his career with RVD, especially when a ladder was added to the mix.



March 2003: As Jeff's WWE career progressed, his look just got odder and odder. But he still gave stars like Christian, whom he first encountered in a thrilling best-of-five tag team series years earlier, some stiff tests.



July 2003: Months after getting released by WWE, Hardy showed up for a one-time-only appearance in Ring of Honor, beating Krazy K (shown) and Joey Matthews in a three-way. In a surprise, he was practically booed out of the building.

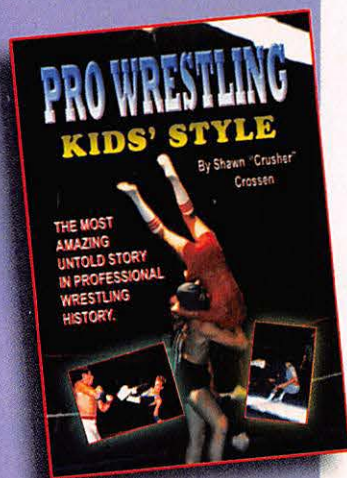
nemesis RVD in a match to unify the European title with the I-C title later that month, with Van Dam again winning.

Jeff's career hit the wall in 2003 due to accumulated injuries, personal problems, and his decision to place more emphasis on outside interests such as writing poetry and performing with his band, Peroxywhygen ... Didn't seem all that upset by WWE's decision to release him ... Took time off to pursue his other interests ... Returned to the ring for a Ring of Honor card in Elizabeth, New Jersey, in July 2003, beating Joey Matthews and Krazy K in a three-way bout, only to be booed before, during, and after the match by fans who felt he had lost his passion for wrestling ... In the summer of 2004, he signed for a match against A.J. Styles in TNA, falling to "The Phenomenal One" in an exciting match ... Dusty Rhodes lobbied for Hardy to ink a full-time TNA deal, and Hardy ultimately agreed, contingent upon receiving a title shot ... Has yet to beat Jarrett for that NWA belt, but he has become a focal point of TNA storylines and remains a top contender to both the heavyweight and X division titles. □



November 2004: We're not sure why Hardy doused himself in green paint for his ladder match with NWA champ Jeff Jarrett at TNA's Victory Road, but it didn't help him score a victory.

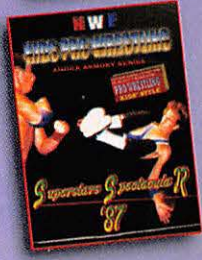
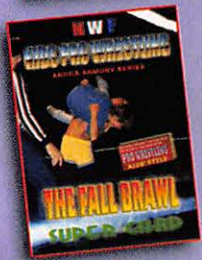




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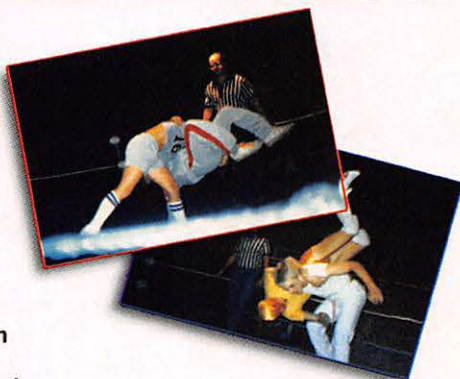
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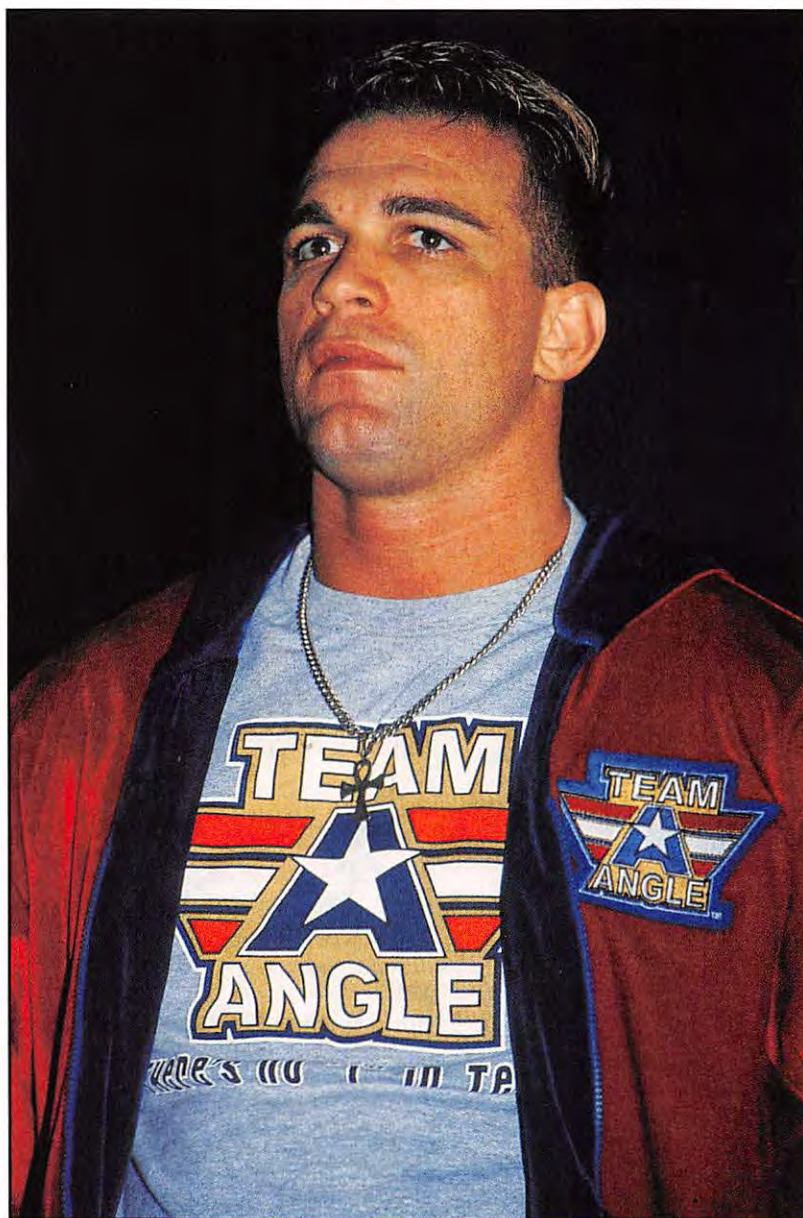
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# Q&A

## CHARLIE HAAS



**"For the record, I did not have an affair with Dawn Marie. That never happened. I've known Dawn for a while now, and we've been friendly, maybe even a little flirtatious in the past. All very innocent by the way ... I don't know why Dawn is saying these things."**

**C**HARLIE HAAS ISN'T accustomed to being the center of controversy. The soft-spoken Seton Hall graduate would much rather let his actions in the ring speak for themselves.

Unfortunately for Haas, the center of controversy is exactly where he finds himself these days ... although there are worse fates than being the object of desire of both Dawn Marie and Jackie Gayda.

It all started when Haas injured his knee during Smackdown's European tour in October, and then had the injured knee attacked by Billy Kidman. While Haas was off television recuperating, Dawn Marie began appearing on **Smackdown**, claiming she was privately nursing Haas back to health. Dawn Marie alleged she and Haas were having a steamy affair, even though Haas had recently gotten engaged to Jackie, his manager, and denied having anything more than casual contact with the sultry brunette.

Now Jackie and Dawn Marie are in the catfight to end all catfights, and Haas is stuck in the middle. Making matters worse, Haas' tag team partner, Rico, was unexpectedly released from WWE in early-November, leaving Charlie a bit unsure of his next career move. Now Haas has been medically cleared to wrestle, but he's having a difficult time focusing on his career while he's dealing with two love-struck and jealous divas. At some point he'll have to decide whether he wants to focus on singles competition or find a new partner. And if he can clear everything up with Jackie, he still has a wedding to plan in his spare time.

Senior Writer Dan Murphy sat down with Haas to talk about the injury, Dawn Marie's allegations, and Haas' plans for his future. "Considering everything that's been going on, both in his personal and professional life, I found Charlie Haas to be surprisingly composed and clear-headed," Murphy said. "He's been through some upheavals, but he seems to have his head about him. I hope he can find some stability soon."



**Q:** Charlie, I realize it's a sensitive question, but it's one that Dawn Marie has brought into the public domain, and I would be remiss if I didn't ask about it. Is there any truth to what Dawn's been saying about the two of you having an affair?

**A:** This whole situation is ridiculous, Dan. I have no idea where all of this is coming from. I'd rather we just not talk about it. I get angry.

**Q:** I understand your reluctance, but this has gone from being a personal scandal to being a public spectacle. You've been pretty quiet about this, and I think you owe your fans an explanation.

**A:** I respect the fact that you've got a job to do, Dan, but my personal life isn't for the fans' consumption. She must be pretty unstable if she cooked up this story. Jackie and I want to keep our private life private if we can. I can't help it if Dawn Marie is going around making up ridiculous stories.

**Q:** You do realize that by trying to remain silent, you're inviting speculation and adding more fuel to the fire of this rumor, right?

**A:** Okay, I can see you're not about to let this go. For the record, I did not have an affair with Dawn Marie. That never happened. I've known Dawn for a while now, and we've been friendly, maybe even a little flirtatious in the past. All very innocent by the way. When I hurt my knee on the European tour, Dawn was one of the first people to come over and see if I was all right, and I appreciated that. Then she came to the hospital to check on me, which was also very nice of her. But there was nothing in the least bit sexual that happened. I don't know why Dawn is saying these things.

**Q:** Do you think it's a matter of Dawn really having a thing for you, or is she trying to exploit your relationship with Jackie to boost her own career?

**A:** I really don't know. Hopefully this whole thing can be cleared up and



If Charlie Haas is looking for a new regular partner, he could do worse than Rey Mysterio Jr., although Mysterio is currently tagging with RVD. But if he wants to go solo, seeking singles matches against Mysterio wouldn't be a bad idea. He's open to just about anything, it seems.

we can all move on. I'd rather be concentrating on winning titles than talking about Dawn's motives. This has all been blown out of proportion.

**Q:** How has this incident affected your relationship with Jackie? She has stood by you publicly, but has she questioned you privately?

**A:** Jackie is the love of my life, and she's been great through this whole thing. She asked me one time about why Dawn would do this, and I told her what I told you. Everything is fine with us. She gets a little crazy when Dawn starts making stuff up in front of a national TV audience, so they've

had some run-ins that everyone, unfortunately, has gotten to see, but I can't blame her for freaking out like that. If some guy was making up stories like that about her, I'd be in his face too.

**Q:** That's certainly understandable, and I do appreciate your honesty on such a sensitive subject. Now on to other matters. How close are you to being back to 100 percent physically in the ring?

**A:** I should be back in top form two to three weeks from now. Luckily, the injury wasn't as severe as it could have been. The knee just locked up on me and I felt a pop and some pretty severe pain. I'm





Being caught in between two beautiful women such as Jackie Gayda (left) and Dawn Marie (above) is the kind of thing dreams are made of, according to some guys. Not Haas. It's been a nightmare for him.

just bailed out of the ring and had some sort of mental breakdown. I'm sure I'd have to get in line behind The Undertaker to get another match with him. He's probably not through with him just yet. But if the guy is that unstable, what's the point? I've found that wrestling is all about karma. If he's ever ready to wrestle me man-to-man, I'll get my chance against Heidenreich, and

or do you have something else planned?

**A:** Oh, I'd love to get my hands on Kidman, first of all. It's one thing to try to injure me. That's fine. I'm fair game. But for him to go and put his hands on a woman for

no reason, that's inexcusable. Kidman is the lowest piece of garbage there is, and I'd like nothing better than to take out my frustrations on him. I haven't forgotten what he did, and he won't forget what I'm going to do to him if they give me the chance.

**Q: What about Heidenreich?**

**A:** I don't get that guy. I imagine you saw what happened when we were supposed to have a match on Smackdown. I don't know if it was even 30 seconds in that he

I'll make the most of it.

**Q: Are you sure that's a battle you want to fight? Heidenreich can be awfully dangerous.**

**A:** This is a dangerous business. If you want to survive in wrestling, you can't back down from anyone, no matter how big, ugly, or crazy they might be. I wouldn't be a wrestler if I didn't think I was capable of holding my own against anyone out there, including Heidenreich.

**Q: Since Rico was released by WWE, you're now without a partner. Are you planning on competing as a singles wrestler, or will you look for a new partner?**

**A:** That depends, really. I see my old partner, Shelton Benjamin, is doing a great job over with Raw as Intercontinental champion. Maybe it's time for me to take a crack at the U.S. title. Of course, I'd love to get some shots at the [Smackdown] title, but I have to move one step at a time.

thankful that I didn't need any major surgery, and it should be just as good as new real soon.

**Q: What's the first order of business now? Kidman exacerbated your injury with his shooting star press, and then he attacked Jackie. Then a couple of weeks ago, Heidenreich left you laying in the middle of the ring when you came out to break up a catfight between Dawn Marie and Jackie. Will you be out for revenge on either of those guys,**



**Q: Does that mean you're all done with tag teams?**

**A:** Not at all. Rico was a great partner, and we had a lot of success, and I wish him the best of luck. I feel comfortable as part of a tag team. There's just something about working as a unit with another wrestler, trying to get yourself totally in synch with him, that I find appealing. I like that kind of challenge. If I could find the right partner, I'd love to get back into a tag team.

**Q: Who are some guys you could see yourself teaming with? Have you felt anybody out yet?**

**A:** There are a few guys I think I'd really like to tag up with. Rob Van Dam and Eddie Guerrero come right to mind. Rey Mysterio could be a strong choice. And I'd certainly always want to have The Big Show on my side. That would make things quite a bit easier on me. But a tag team is really all about team chemistry. That's much more important than just pairing off two skilled guys. I really have to think it over more.

**Q: You made reference to Shelton**

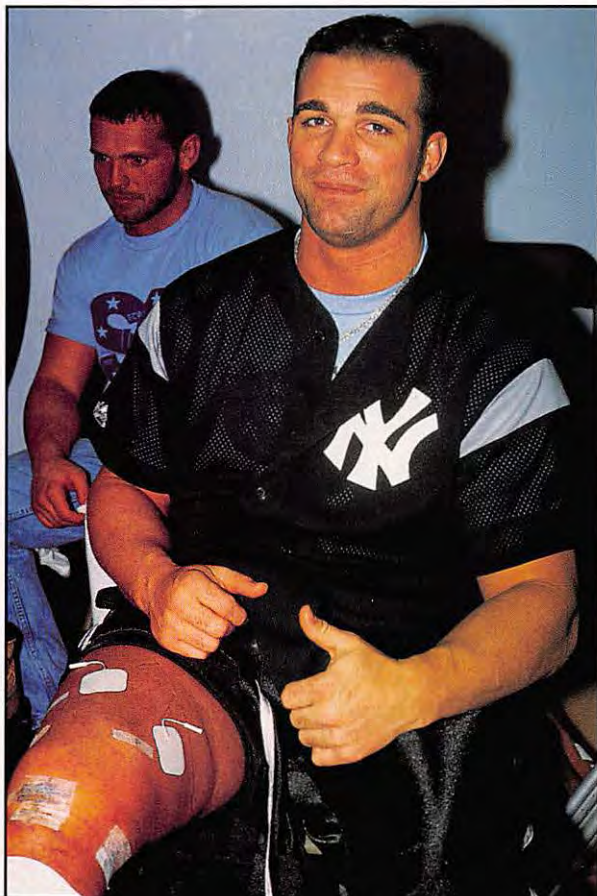
Haas has shown he can hold his own against Benoit in recent years (below), so that could bode well for a solo career for him. Avoiding the injury bug (right) from here on is something he really needs to do.

Benjamin before. A lot of us thought that you guys having to split up was a bad thing, but he took full advantage and just dove right into the singles division with Raw and has become a breakout star. Are you tempted to try to do the same thing?

**A:** I think I know what you're getting at. I've been part of a tag team for most of my career, but I don't look at it like I'm taking the safe route with my career. I just really enjoy tag team wrestling. But like I said, I'm keeping my options open. At this stage of my career, I'm more than ready to wrestle on my own every night.

**Q: Thank you, Charlie, and good luck getting things back in order.**

**A:** Thanks, Dan. Things are looking up. I can't wait to really get back into the swing of things. I think 2005 could be a great year for me both professionally and with Jackie. □





# PPV



## How Taboo Tuesday & Victory Road Changed The Sport Forever

By James Guttman

**T**HIS FALL SAW the two biggest wrestling companies in the United States enter uncharted territory. Risks were taken. Bold decisions were made. And fingers were crossed in Stamford, Connecticut, Nashville, Tennessee, and Orlando, Florida.

With Taboo Tuesday, Vince McMahon and WWE experimented with a new pay-per-view concept on a day of the week on which their fan base isn't used to watching wrestling at all. With Victory Road, the Jarretts and TNA changed their business model entirely and prayed their first foray into the world of Sunday night pay-per-view would be a success. After all, they wouldn't get another chance to make a first impression, not on Sunday night at least.

So how did they do? Allow us to break down the two shows for you, starting with ...



# REVOLUTION!

Triple-H (opposite page) and Jeff Jarrett (below) were the big winners inside the ring at Taboo Tuesday and Victory Road, respectively. Were their promotions big winners for going forward with their bold PPV plans?





# TABOO TUESDAY

Introducing a new pay-per-view during a time in which you have already saturated (some would say oversaturated) the market was quite the risky endeavor. World Wrestling Entertainment did just that, however, and complicated things by traveling a route that's even more difficult. It unveiled plans to tackle one of the least likely nights of the week for a wrestling pay-per-view: Tuesday.

With this move came innovation. Knowing full well that the evening itself would be a tough sell to its increasingly fickle audience, WWE trotted out a new concept. Entitled Taboo Tuesday, this October 19 event, held at the Bradley Center in Milwaukee, would be different from any other in the promotion's long, storied history. Rather than taking it upon himself to decide what fans would and would not see, McMahon, always the risk-taker, decreed that the fans themselves would decide ... to an extent. They would pick the challengers, match stipulations, and, for one match, even the diva costumes. In theory, Taboo Tuesday had all the makings of a historic card.

No one, though, is calling the show an enormous success, not from a financial standpoint anyway. WWE's preliminary estimates suggested that the show drew only about 174,000 buys, the



WWE hoped some unusual stipulation options for some of the matches would pique the interest of fans who were on the fence as to whether or not to order Taboo Tuesday. Fans chose the head-shaving stipulation for the Eric Bischoff-Eugene match.

lowest number for a WWE pay-per-view in many years, lower than even Smackdown's No Mercy (193,000), which took place less than three weeks earlier and offered a subpar card, and Raw's September offering, Unforgiven, which pulled in 243,000 buys, according to WWE.

The news sounds even worse when you consider that *those* numbers were down by 47,000 buys in the case of No Mercy and 37,000 buys in the case of Unforgiven compared to the figures for the PPVs of the same names in 2003. A lot of the blame has to be placed on the company, which, again, knew it was taking a risk, but Taboo Tuesday's buy rate surely couldn't have been helped by the fact that it aired opposite Game 6 of the white-hot American League Championship Series between the Boston Red Sox and the New York Yankees. But there was some good news coming out of the event.

## Tuesday Night Triumphs

**1. It's Tuesday.** WWE has long had a thing for Tuesdays. There was *Tuesday Night Titans*, the cable-TV faux interview show that aired on the USA Network in the mid-1980s and gave us such memorable moments as Vince McMahon dressed in a canary-yellow



One strong positive working for Taboo Tuesday was that due to its interactive nature, we got to see Chris Jericho defend the I-C title against fellow fan favorite Shelton Benjamin, a match we would not likely have seen otherwise.



suit. Then there was Tuesday in Texas, a half-price pay-per-view in 1991 famous for Jake Roberts and his Elizabeth slap as well as a rematch between new WWF World champion The Undertaker and Hulk Hogan just six days after they clashed in a controversial bout at Survivor Series. In 2004, fans got Taboo Tuesday, a full-price pay PPV that allowed them to vote on title matches and stipulations. *Hmmmmmm*, that sounds interesting. It almost made you forget that it was taking place ... on a Tuesday night.

Well, that was the idea. Take away the interactive style. Take away the title matches and gimmick bouts. At the end of it all, this show was on a Tuesday night. If any people spent \$34.95 to tune in, it would have been a good thing. In a tough pay-per-view market, Vince McMahon had introduced an extra pay-per-view on a night on which most people don't even think about wrestling. The best way to go about this was to make it unlike any other show during the year. It needed something special.

What the company did, to its credit, was present the event with so much sparkle and shine that a significant number of people overlooked the fact that it was an extra expense on a night that would normally cost them nothing to watch TV. With so many things offered on the show, capped off by the interactive voting, WWE did a pretty good job of taking the focus off the event's main weakness. Instead, it focused on the innovative concept of fan voting. That's something for which WWE should be commended.

## 2. Memorable Moments.

Something obviously went right with the presentation of this show. Fans were treated to an Intercontinental title change when their challenger of choice, Shelton Benjamin, dethroned Chris Jericho. In a wrestling world in which the villains still usually step up to face the heroes, and vice versa, Benjamin's hopes for a title shot against Y2J appeared to be slim. With the people at home calling the shots, however, he got that elusive match and won it cleanly. Had it not been for the audience and the concept of fan voting, Benjamin probably would have had to wait for a heel to challenge and defeat Jericho before he would get his title shot.

More history was made by the (albeit short) tag title reign of Chris Benoit and Edge. La Resistance fell to a duo made up of the rejected nominees for



We got some memorable performances at Taboo Tuesday for sure. Chris Benoit singlehandedly beating La Resistance for the Raw tag title is easily overlooked (above). And what about Snitsky manhandling Kane (below)?



the Raw title match. Having lost out to Shawn Michaels in the voting to determine a challenger to Triple-H, Benoit and Edge got a consolation prize and were placed in a tag team championship bout. Even with the bitter Edge walking out on him, Chris Benoit fought alone and captured the gold. It was a wonderful performance and a tremendous moment,



### **TABOO TUESDAY: COMPLETE RESULTS**

Intercontinental champion Shelton Benjamin pinned Chris Jericho to win the title ... Women's champion Trish Stratus won a seven-woman battle royal in which fans voted for the divas to wear schoolgirl outfits, last eliminating Molly Holly (Stacy Keibler, Gail Kim, Nidia, Victoria, and Jazz were the other participants) ... Gene Snitsky pinned Kane in a steel chain match ... Eugene pinned Eric Bischoff in a loser-gets-his-head-shaved match ... Chris Benoit & Edge defeated Raw tag team champions Robert Conway & Sylvan Grenier to win the title after Edge abandoned Benoit and left the ring ... Christy Hemme defeated Carmella DeCesare in a lingerie pillow fight ... Raw champion Triple-H pinned Shawn Michaels after Edge interfered and speared Michaels ... Randy Orton pinned Ric Flair in a steel cage match.

and the fans helped to make it ... sort of ... in a roundabout way.

Eric Bischoff got a haircut courtesy of his nephew Eugene, while Jonathan Coachman, a little too smug and overbearing for Mr. McMahon's taste after Bischoff's loss, had to change into and model a dress for all to see. And there was Kane getting beaten senseless by Gene Snitsky. Yes, "The Big Red Machine," the man who has given The Undertaker some of the toughest matches of his life, was bloodied and sent away on a stretcher by a man who didn't even have a developmental deal a few months earlier and wasn't even much of a prospect.

Then Randy Orton and Ric Flair had an old-time

bloody brawl inside a steel cage to cap off the program. It was a memorable night inside the ring. And maybe that's what mattered most.

### **Taboo Boo-Boos**

**1. Execution, execution, execution!** This was probably the biggest drawback to the event. Taboo Tuesday had the potential to create a special kind of drama and intrigue. As opposed to standard wrestling matches, in which fans like to guess at the outcomes, Taboo Tuesday had a different type of alluring quality. Fans weren't left wondering who would win or lose as much as they were wondering who would even participate. It should have guaranteed a strong reaction from the audience and allowed WWE to tease the winning nominee until the moment of his match, unveiling him to a huge chorus of cheers. The best example of this missed opportunity came with Triple H and his Raw title challenger.

Prior to the event, fans were told that there would be three possible challengers to "The Game" and his gold. Chris Benoit, Edge, and Shawn Michaels were the only men in the running. The winner would go on to face the champ, while the remaining two would face the tag team titleholders. It would stand to reason that Triple-H's Raw title match would be the second-to-last bout on the show and start with his fired up opponent running down the aisle to lock up with him. The fans, unaware of who had won the voting, would find out the opponent's identity only when his music hit and would thus react excitedly. And neither the challenger nor the champion would have time to prepare.

The final match of the night, while a bit of let-down, would then be the tag title bout, with the two men we all knew didn't win going on to face La Resistance for the tag gold. It would have added to the drama of a groundbreaking event.

Instead, WWE presented the winners in a flat, matter-of-fact manner. Everyone found out that Michaels won the voting long before the contest took place. The tag match happened before Hunter's title defense. The drama was all but gone. The irony of it all is that it wasn't a matter of WWE wanting to keep the Raw title match as the main event. The main event slot was already reserved for Ric Flair vs. Randy Orton, a match in which fans only got to decide whether it would be hardcore or falls-count-anywhere in nature, or held inside a steel cage. With just a little reshuffling, Taboo Tuesday could have had a few more amazing moments for both the live audience and the people watching at home.



The divas battle royal was fun in its own way. Did it really matter which of the three outfits fans chose for them to wear? We all knew we'd be seeing plenty of skin.





The voting for the Raw title match was very close. It would have been more intriguing if it were open to everyone on the Raw roster ... and the results weren't revealed until the last possible moment.

**2. Choices ... what choices?** A steel chair, a steel chain, or a lead pipe? Which one of these sounds most appealing for a Kane-Snitsky brawl? Is there much of a difference? Divas in nurses' uniforms, French maid outfits, or schoolgirl getups? Wouldn't we be seeing a lot of skin regardless of which option won out? It's choices like this that took away from the feel of a truly interactive event for WWE. Fans weren't offered the opportunity to fully shape the event and tailor it to their liking. Rather, to use a cooking analogy, they were given only the chance to season a show that had already been cooked.

Most matches were already booked prior to the event. Ric Flair vs. Randy Orton, Christy vs. Carmella, and Eugene vs. Eric Bischoff were absolutely going to happen. All that was left to decide were match stipulations. However, the nominees weren't all that different from one another. That took away from the show as a whole. Had WWE decided to go all out and really give fans a chance to pick from a large pool (as it did for the Chris Jericho I-C title defense), it would have ensured that this show would be one to remember.

Why did Benoit, Edge, and Michaels have to be the only choices for the Raw title match? Why not open the voting up to the entire roster? Chances are, fans would have still picked these three men among the top five or so. So why not give them that chance? If the viewing audience were to pick

Steven Richards or Rosey as Triple-H's opponent by 95 percent, so be it. If they wanted Chris Jericho, the Intercontinental champ, put that on TV and give fans what they wanted, even if it meant Jericho also had to defend his I-C title in a separate match.

It just seemed counterproductive to offer such a select number of nominees when the company could have lived on the edge and offered a larger pool of names, pretty much expected the same result, and given the show a little more intrigue in the process. It would have been enough to really take interest in the fan voting concept to a higher level.

### The Bottom Line

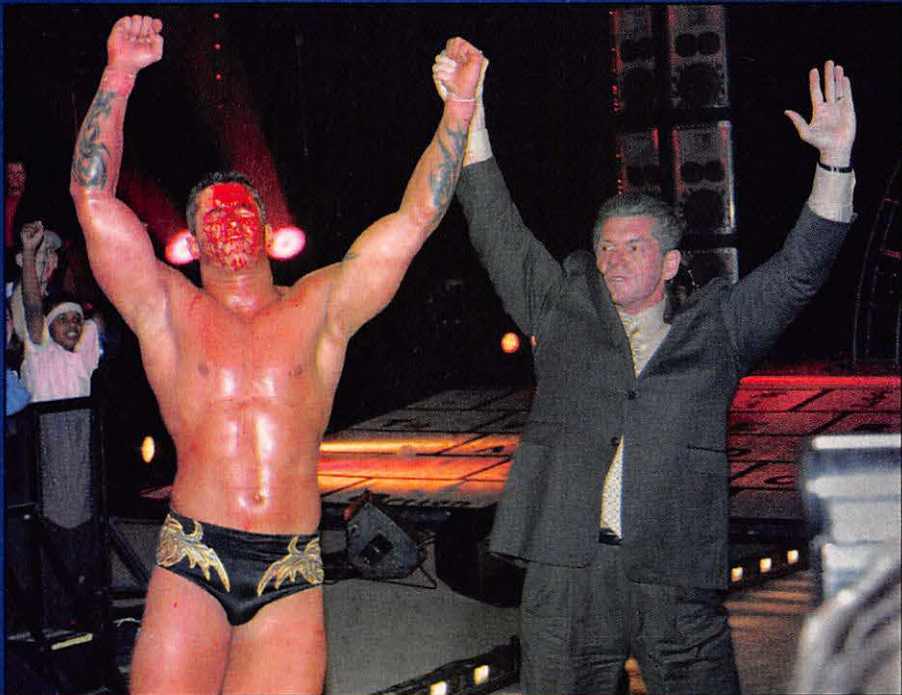
Just another notch on WWE's pay-per-view belt? Taboo Tuesday earned WWE only a modest profit compared to other recent PPV efforts, but it was a worthy experiment. Despite the lack of intriguing choices in most

of the matches, Taboo Tuesday 2004 could be the bare bones blueprint for next year's installment, if there is one. WWE just needs to tweak the concept a little. By offering more choices and perhaps putting the show on a Sunday night, WWE could turn into something amazing and perhaps very profitable.

\*\*\*

## VICTORY ROAD

TNA is a pay-per-view company. It was born on pay-per-view TV in June 2002 and has lived and died with PPV ever since. When finances and its



Vince McMahon endorsed Randy Orton after he beat Ric Flair in a cage match to close out the PPV. Will he give us another interactive show in 2004 ... and if so, will it be on a Tuesday again?



parent company, Panda Energy, dictated that it was time to move from a weekly two-hour pay-per-view schedule on Wednesday nights to monthly three-hour pay-per-views on Sunday nights, TNA had a lot to prove. Could this event, at three times the price of previous shows despite offering only one extra hour of action, live up to its hype? Would the new (familiar) names be enough to draw in some new TNA fans? Would the young stars up their games in light of the increased attention? The questions kept coming, and by the time TNA presented Victory Road on November 7, everyone had something to ask. TNA did its best to answer them.

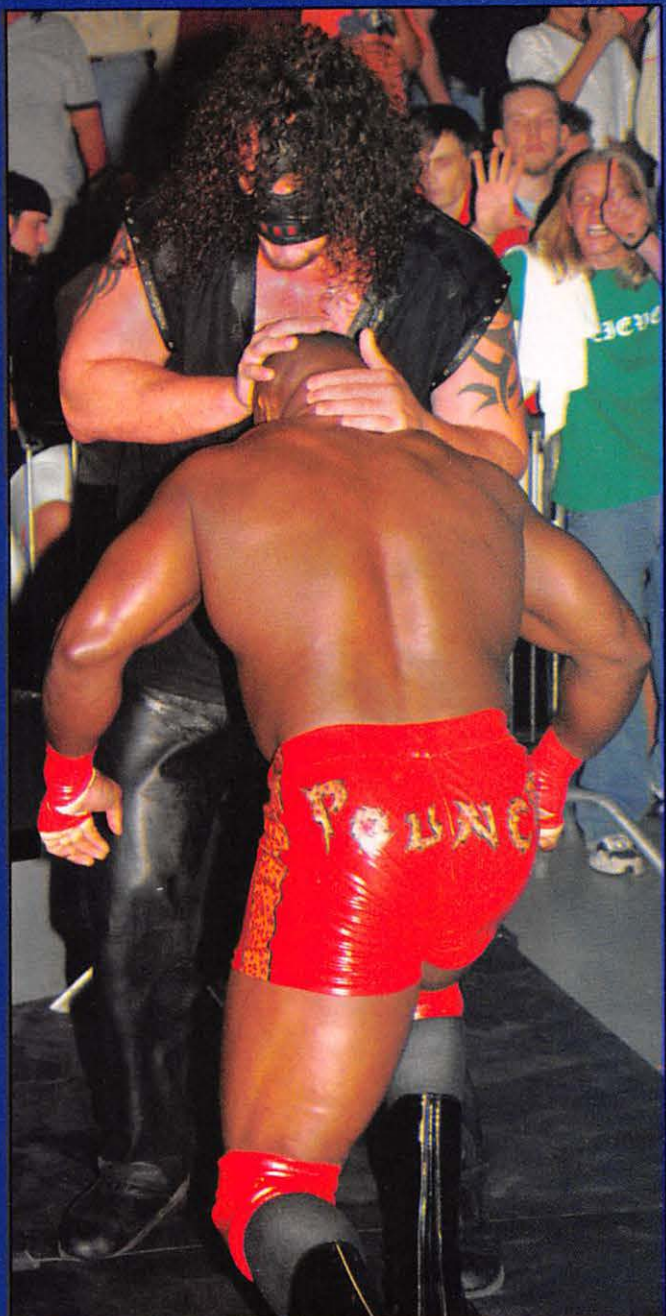
Kicking off its biggest promotional push ever, Total Nonstop Action started things with Victory Road. Serving as a precursor to a series of specials on Fox Sports Net's *Best Damn Sports Show Period* and the impromptu WWE "Cookie Invasion" (see "What's Happening" on page 6), the pay-per-view was supposed to showcase what TNA was all about. In some ways, it did. In other ways, well, there were problems.

### Total Nonstop Achievements

**1. Right place, right time, right format.** At a time when WWE is most susceptible to a competitor showing up and blowing its doors down, TNA has stepped up and made its presence known. While the company has been in existence since June 2002, now it's finally doing things the correct way. It's using its weekly television shows, *Impact* on Fox Sports Net and the syndicated *Xplosion*, to build to, hype, and ultimately sell pay-per-views,



TNA fans who love the X division got a real treat with the Victory Road opener. Twenty X division stars showed their stuff in a gauntlet match/battle royal won by Hector Garza.



Those fans who have been loyal to TNA from the beginning must have enjoyed seeing the "homegrown" Abyss and Monty Brown showcased in such a high-profile bout with Raven.

rather than using pay-per-views to get itself weekly television.

Until Victory Road, TNA was at the mercy of Wednesday night's fickle fan base. Since *Impact* offered few big matches, each opportunity to catch the best TNA had to offer cost \$9.95. And getting fans to make the decision to spend 10 bucks week after week after week was not easy. Now, finally, fans would be sold on a pay-per-view card and see it take shape over a period of four weeks before being expected to pay for it. Anyone watching *Impact* on Fox Sports Net had the chance to see what he was in for with a TNA PPV long before any money left his bank account.



In that respect, Victory Road delivered. It was a worthy presentation of the promotion's strong points. After watching the pay-per-view, you were left with a firm understanding of what TNA was and the direction it planned on taking. Whether you liked that direction or not is another story. Early estimates suggested that the show drew more than 30,000 buys, and while that's far, far fewer than the number a very disappointing WWE Taboo Tuesday drew, it's actually a higher number than a lot of insiders predicted and a reason

for optimism. If it holds up, the show would be the most successful in TNA history and would, on its own, make a profit. TNA's big problem, however, is that while Viacom pays handsomely for the rights to air weekly WWE programming, TNA pays Fox Sports Net to air *Impact*. But it looks like this was a good start.

**2. You know who these guys are!** TNA's initial Sunday night offering wasn't short on name talent. Roddy Piper, Kevin Nash, Scott Hall, Jimmy Snuka, Randy Savage, Johnny B. Badd (Marc Mero), Jacquelyn, and Jeff Hardy were all names that WWE fans knew so very well. Utilizing these players on the broadcast gave new fans a glimpse at some stars they had remembered from years past.

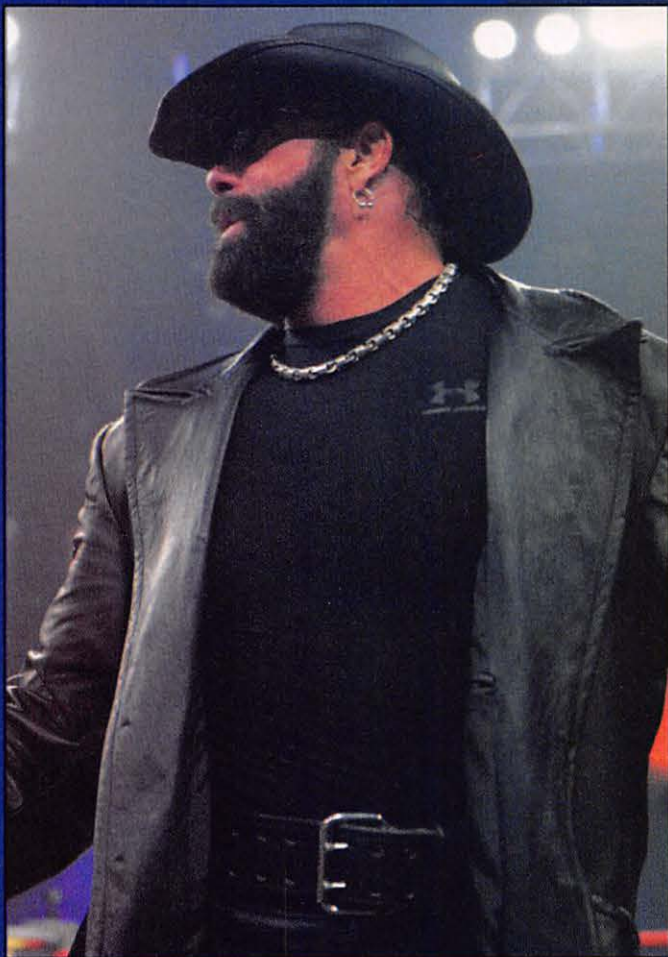
For a company hoping to captivate an audience that had since left pro wrestling behind or had just been suffering from WWE burnout, having names like Hall and Nash on the lineup could be quite beneficial. As instruments for attracting interest in the company's first major pay-per-view, these men served their purpose. You'll remember Victory Road for the Piper-Snuka confrontation, Outsiders run-in, and "Macho Man" surprise appearance. If the company set out to find names that people would know and want to see again, it did a fine job.

### **Victory Roadblocks**

**1. Let's do the Time Warp again!** While names like Randy Savage, Kevin Nash, and Scott Hall were good in the sense that they might have gotten the attention of new TNA fans, the way in which they were used was questionable. For weeks leading into the show, TNA had all but stopped focusing on Jeff Jarrett's title defense against Jeff



It was smart of TNA to add name talent to its first three-hour PPV. Seeing Roddy Piper host "In The Pit With Piper" and make peace with Jimmy Snuka (above) was a nice touch. We question whether making Randy Savage (below) look like the show's biggest star was a good thing, however.







Pure athleticism was placed in the spotlight when A.J. Styles challenged Petey Williams for the X title—and lost.

Hardy. Instead of the question being who would walk out of Victory Road with the NWA title, it became whose side were The Outsiders on? It isn't good to see a promotion's first major pay show main event watered down by peripheral issues.

Victory Road should have been all about the epic athletic showdown between the company's two hottest competitors. Instead, it was about where two men who had reached their peak eight years ago would rest their allegiances. In the end, Jarrett's victory over Hardy was almost inconsequential. The real intrigue was all about Hall and Nash (who both sided with Jarrett).

Also, Savage did his part to steal the main event spotlight. The "Macho Man," also many years removed from his best days, provided the show-closing spark of excitement. In essence, Savage was showcased as the company's most prized asset. With such a deep and talent-rich roster, you have to wonder why TNA is so intent on promoting wrestling's past as its own future, especially when many question how long Savage, Hall, and Nash will stick around.

## VICTORY ROAD: COMPLETE RESULTS

Hector Garza won a 20-man X division gauntlet match/battle royal, defeating Frankie Kazarian (the last man eliminated), Sonjay Dutt, Puma, L.A. Park, Jerrelle Clark, Miyamoto, Michael Shane, Nosawa, Mikey Batts, Alex Shelley, Matt Sydal, Sonny Siaki, Jason Cross, Shark Boy, Psicosis, D-Ray 3000, Amazing Red, Spanky, and Chris Sabin ... Johnny B. Badd, "Empire Saint" Pat Kenney, Ron Killings, & Erik Watts defeated Kid Kash, Dallas, & The Naturals ... B.G. James & Konnan defeated NWA tag team champions Bobby Rude & Eric Young to win the title ... Monty Brown defeated Raven and Abyss in a three-way "Monsters' Ball" match ... TNA X champion Petey Williams pinned A.J. Styles ... Chris Harris & James Storm defeated Christopher Daniels & Elix Skipper in a last-team-standing match ... NWA heavyweight champion Jeff Jarrett defeated Jeff Hardy in a ladder match after Scott Hall & Kevin Nash interfered on his behalf.

**2. Unneeded extras.** The announcers never stop yelling! Don West and Mike Tenay sounded like two kids that just ate an entire box of Pixie Sticks. Every moment, every move, every interview, and every announcement had to be treated like the start of World War III. While it was understandable for broadcasters to show emotion over an enjoyable card, it was not so understandable for the broadcaster to lose their mind over everything. By the time the show ended, it was difficult for the home viewer to

The feud between America's Most Wanted and Christopher Daniels and Elix Skipper had been building for so long that it deserved a prominent spot on the Victory Road card. AMW won the last-team-standing encounter.





determine what the show's high points were, because fans were told that everything was a high point. When announcers pick and choose their moments of insanity, those moments mean a lot more. A broadcaster that can't get enough of everything seems desperate and phony.

Vince Russo and Dusty Rhodes meeting in an election of sorts was unnecessary as well. With Victory Road happening so soon after Taboo Tuesday, TNA needed to create a voice for itself. It would have been easier for the company to have had one of its owners decide which man would be the director of authority. Considering that WWE just made a big deal out of Internet voting, you would think that TNA wouldn't do a poor imitation so soon. It did.

### ***The Bottom Line***

Ultimately, the company needs to look back at the things it did well and the things it did poorly. It was when TNA stayed true to its pledge to offer wrestling fans an alternative to WWE that it truly excelled. When it tried to copy WWE—or worse, WCW—it really seemed to falter.

All that considered, TNA has finally opened the door for itself on monthly pay-per-view. This was an impressive first three-hour effort. The time for TNA to mount some sort of challenge to the Mc-Empire has finally arrived. □

Jeff Hardy turned in a gutsy, high-flying performance against Jeff Jarrett (left), but the NWA title was not meant to be his on this night. The newly crowned Kings of Wrestling—Jeff Jarrett, Kevin Nash, and Scott Hall—all conspired against him (below).





# > WRESTLING COLLECTORS!

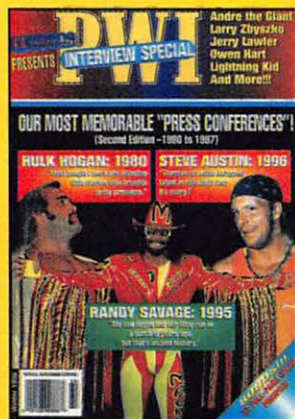
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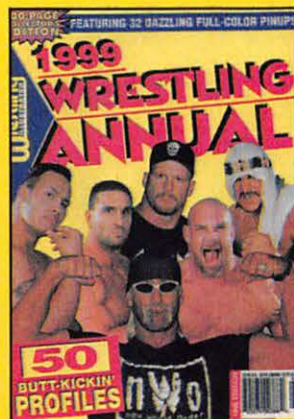
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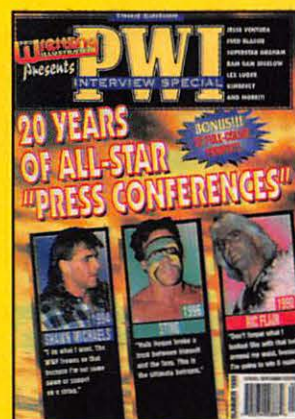
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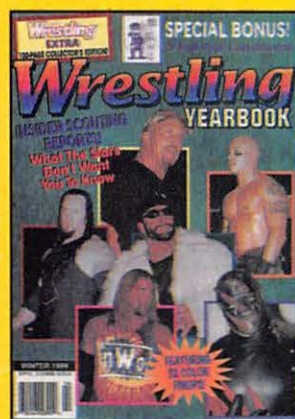
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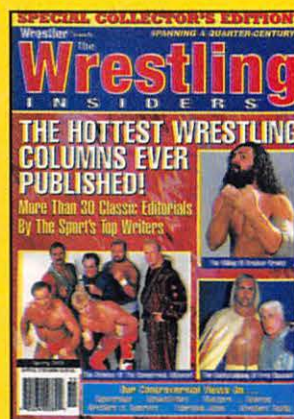
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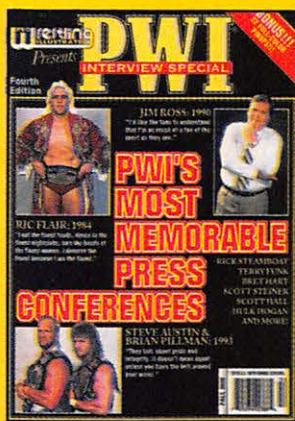


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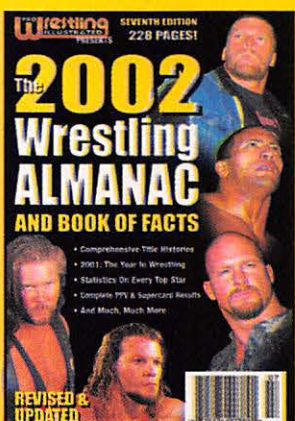




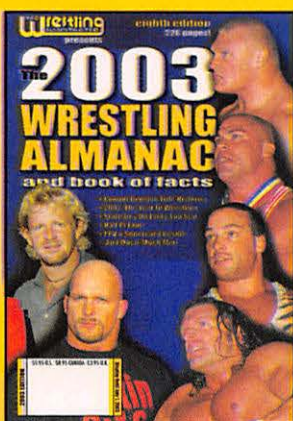
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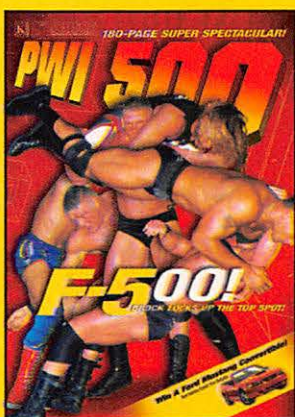
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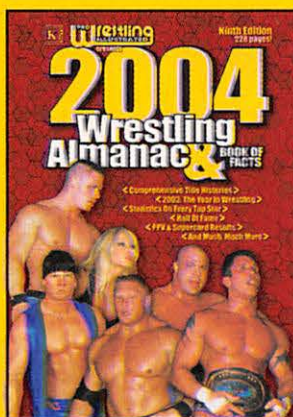
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**His first-and so far only-reign as WWE Smackdown lasted longer than many expected, but he hasn't been in the title mix much since summer. It seems like a good time for that to change**

By Jason Langin

**A**N INDISPUTABLE WRESTLING truth: *To be the man, you have to beat the man.*

But what happens when you're no longer the man?

In the case of legendary champions such as Ric Flair, Hulk Hogan, and Steve Austin, you simply become the man again. It's the only option; you won't allow yourself to be denied. But for many ex-champions, becoming the man again is a task that is even harder than beating the man to become the man the first time.

That is the task now (still) facing Eddie Guerrero, a man who rose to the top of the WWE Smackdown roster with an improbable victory over Brock Lesnar at No Way Out in February 2004. Guerrero's conquest marked a turning point in WWE. He

became the first wrestler in a *very* long time to become "the man" based on his in-ring talent and not his character. True, Guerrero had become more entertaining than he had been in the past with his "lie, cheat, and steal" motto and his low-rider entrances. But he was essentially the same guy with, happily, the same talent that so many fans had recognized and appreciated for so many years.

Guerrero's reign lasted only four months, but it was a solid four months with successful title defenses against Kurt Angle, Rey Mysterio Jr., Shelton Benjamin, Booker T, The Basham Brothers, and The Big Show. Guerrero eventually lost his title in a bullrope match to John Bradshaw Layfield at The Great American Bash and also lost a high-profile rematch in a thrilling steel cage encounter on *Smackdown*.

And that left Guerrero in a bad way. "Latino Heat" was chilled by JBL, the most unlikely world champion not named David Arquette or Vince Russo in, what, a decade? And he couldn't get the belt back? He then got caught up in another feud with Angle and his underlings, a feud that many believe has been more harmful than helpful to Guerrero's career. It makes no sense, but he seems to have given up his pursuit of the title.

"Eddie's been there and done that with Angle," said long-time friend/rival Rey Mysterio Jr. "I've tried talking to him about it, but he's so stubborn. He will fight Angle until one of them can't fight anymore."

As this seemingly never-ending feud continues, Guerrero's title chances seem



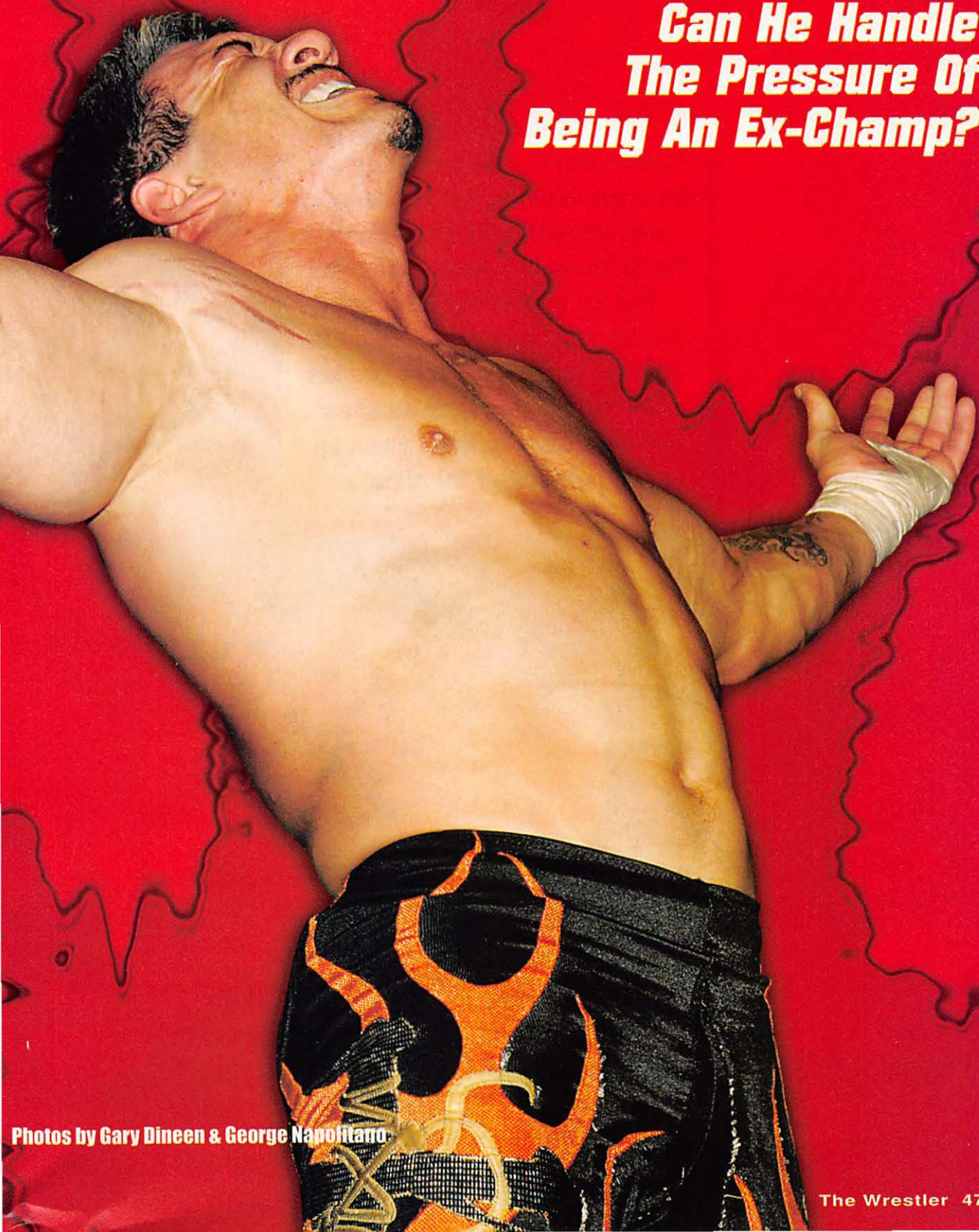
Eddie Guerrero gave Kurt Angle great match after great match in 2004. But in the second half of the year, Guerrero didn't parlay many of those great matches/performances into Smackdown title shots.



# **EDDIE GUERRERO**

**AT ANOTHER CAREER CROSSROADS:**

*Can He Handle  
The Pressure Of  
Being An Ex-Champ?*



Photos by Gary Dineen & George Napolitano



to be fading. With the release of so many WWE stars in favor of younger talent, the 37-year-old Guerrero could find himself back on the outside looking in on the Smackdown title picture for good.

"JBL is not a better wrestler than Eddie," continued Misterio. "But I think maybe he's craftier sometimes. And right now, Eddie's just not focused on getting back to the top."

That seems to be the problem with so many former champions. Wrestlers like Kane, The Ultimate Warrior, and The Iron Sheik come to mind as examples of WWF World champions who were never able to recapture the spotlight a second time. Kane's one-day title reign in 1998 ended after he was outsmarted by Steve Austin. The Ultimate Warrior's career began to fade into obscurity after his nine-month run as champion in 1990-'91 ended. After being the sacrificial lamb for "Hulkamania" in 1984, The Iron Sheik never regained main event status.

"When you're going for a title," said Raw color commentator Jerry Lawler, "you're hungry. You're angry. You want what the other guy has. You watch the champion's interviews.

You see how he throws around money and you want that. You've got more desire."

"The King's" counterpart with Smackdown, Tazz, agrees with Lawler. "Everyone thinks the challenger is at a disadvantage in a title match. That's not true; the *champion* is at the disadvantage. The challenger has nothing to lose! If you go all out and you fail, it doesn't matter. The champion has everything to lose."

Current Raw champion Triple-H is perhaps today's best example of true determination. On nine separate occasions, Helmsley has held one of the two world titles in WWE. No matter to whom he loses, he always seems to be able to bounce back and win the title again. Helmsley's Evolution teammate Ric Flair was also a master at regaining world titles. They rarely allow themselves to stop focusing on the big picture ... and the big prize.

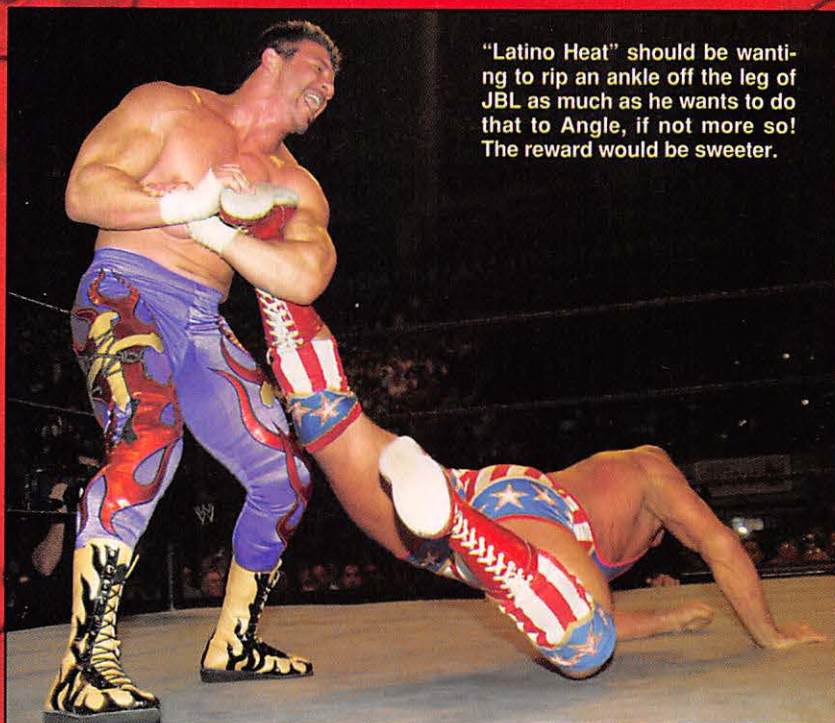
"I don't know if I see Guerrero doing it," said Flair. "The guy's a great talent without a shadow of a doubt. He comes from a tough family. He can fly, he can brawl, he can outwrestle most of the guys in the locker room. But I don't

**"'Latino Heat' was chilled by JBL, the most unlikely world champion not named David Arquette or Vince Russo in, what, a decade? And he couldn't get the belt back? He then got caught up in another feud with Angle and his underlings ... It makes no sense, but he seems to have given up his pursuit of the title."**



Not only has Guerrero been bogged down in a feud with Angle for far too long, but he has gotten sucked into feuds with Mark Jindrak and Angle's other henchman, Luther Reigns.





"Latino Heat" should be wanting to rip an ankle off the leg of JBL as much as he wants to do that to Angle, if not more so! The reward would be sweeter.

would still be competing on a mid-card level. His fans, however, feel that Guerrero will have his chance again.

The question is how does Guerrero feel?

In the past, Guerrero has regained championships of less significance, but it has taken him considerable time to do so. In 2002, Guerrero won his second Intercontinental title, a championship he had lost two years earlier. In 2003, he won his second U.S. title, a championship he had lost nearly seven years earlier. There is little doubt that Guerrero has the talent to regain a title, but does he always have the drive?

Guerrero is still on the fringe of the main event picture. He has an important match on *Smackdown* nearly every week. However, he needs to make his presence known to JBL once again. On the Raw side, Triple-H

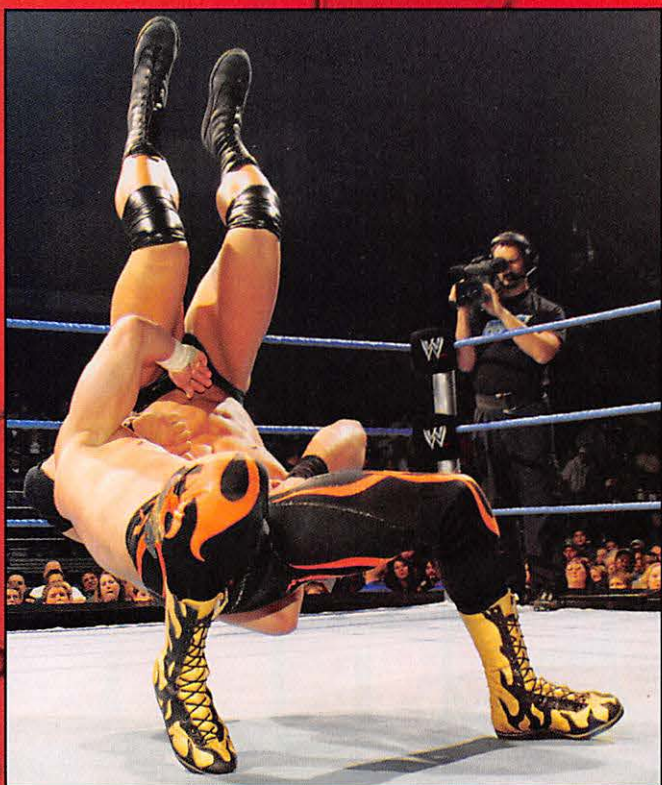
know if he has it where it counts. You have to have the heart. I had it. Triple-H has it. Even guys like Hogan had it. Guerrero, though, he hasn't shown me that he has it. Not yet anyway."

Many critics think Guerrero's victory over Lesnar was a fluke, that if it had not been for the distraction provided by Bill Goldberg, Guerrero

has many competitors jumping in his face on a regular basis. Since defeating Guerrero, Bradshaw has smartly focused on only one challenger at a time. Maybe that's why he has defied the odds and retained his title in defenses against The Undertaker and Booker T.


And now that the dust has settled from Survivor Series, Guerrero *must* insert himself back into the WWE championship picture and stay there. If he does not, he could very well get swept up in another series of matches that will do little to advance his career.

The great ones are able to handle the pressure. If Guerrero can battle through this challenging time, if he can make it back to the top of the WWE mountain, history might remember "Latino Heat" as one of those great ones. □



Considering his vast skills and the fact that he was the dominant Smackdown wrestler during the first six months of 2004, Eddie ought to be able to plow through Jindrak with no trouble (above left and above right). Strangely, that hasn't happened.





Jushin Liger and Samoa Joe look like an odd couple, but the important thing is they made an excellent team. How could Liger go wrong with the man who has been ROH champ for nearly two years?

# JUSHIN

Photos by Joe Zanolle



**You don't get the type of respect that Jushin Liger gets by accident. It takes intense focus and a firm stance against accepting anything that's second-best. When Liger returned to the U.S. for the first time in years, he knew that he needed more than a good partner. He demanded perfection**

**By James Guttman**

**T**HE TICKETS WERE booked. The contracts were signed. Jushin "Thunder" Liger, junior heavyweight legend the world over, was prepared to leave Japan and travel to the United States. In a rare trip to America, he would wrestle proudly for Ring of Honor. He was already scheduled to meet "American Dragon" Bryan Danielson, a fellow junior heavyweight that frequently competes in Japan as well, and he knew it wouldn't be easy. He understood that Danielson could build a career on a single victory over him in the States.

A natural worry for Liger going into this was that he would be outnumbered by his opponent's allies. Danielson had been around ROH long enough to make a friend or two. Chances are that with someone like Liger coming into the area in such a high-profile appearance, someone else would want to take a shot at him. In celebration of his arrival, Ring of Honor had dedicated an entire weekend to him, its special "Weekend Of Thunder." If that doesn't scream, "Make a name for yourself by attacking me!" nothing does. Liger needed backup. He needed it in a big way.

Following a phone call to ROH executives, Liger received a package in the mail. Inside he found a number of videos from the company's recent shows. However, Liger wasn't looking to sit back, sip on a little *sake*, and enjoy the card. He had a decision to make. That decision involved allegiances. He needed a part-

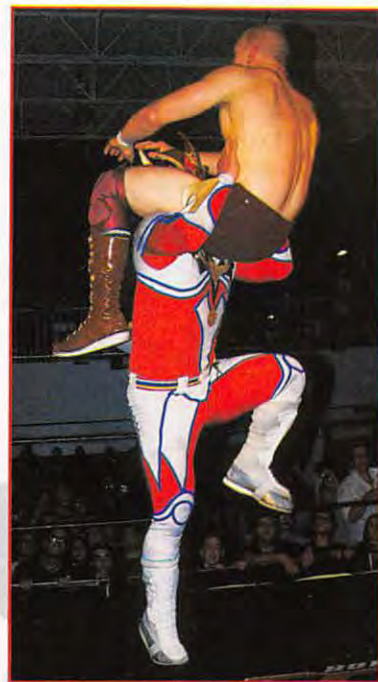
ner. However, with so much attention on his grand comeback to the States, Liger couldn't let the fans down. He wasn't just looking for a tag partner. He was looking for the perfect partner.

He surfed through the tapes and offered comments to his agent on everyone he saw.

When seeing Jack Evans, Liger nodded and commented on his high-risk maneuvers. He decided against him because his style was too similar to his own. "You can't make something new by combining things that are the same," the 11-time IWGP junior heavyweight champion pointed out in his native Japanese.

This went on for hours. Each wrestler had something that Liger didn't feel would be an ideal match for him. While small and unnoticeable to most wrestling fans, these nuances were enough that he couldn't just overlook them. As is often the case with people who excel at their craft, Liger is a perfectionist. As if the search for a regular teammate wasn't intense enough, the search for the ideal partner for a heavily hyped tour seemed impossible. That is, until he saw Samoa Joe.

Immediately, Liger sat up. He didn't say much for the duration of the contest between Joe and Homicide on the *Generation Next* video. He simply nodded at spots and looked to genuinely be taking it all in. After seeing the finish to the match, he stood up, ejected the video, and began to speak excitedly to his agent. After being told something in a firm voice by Liger, the agent left the room. Liger, through

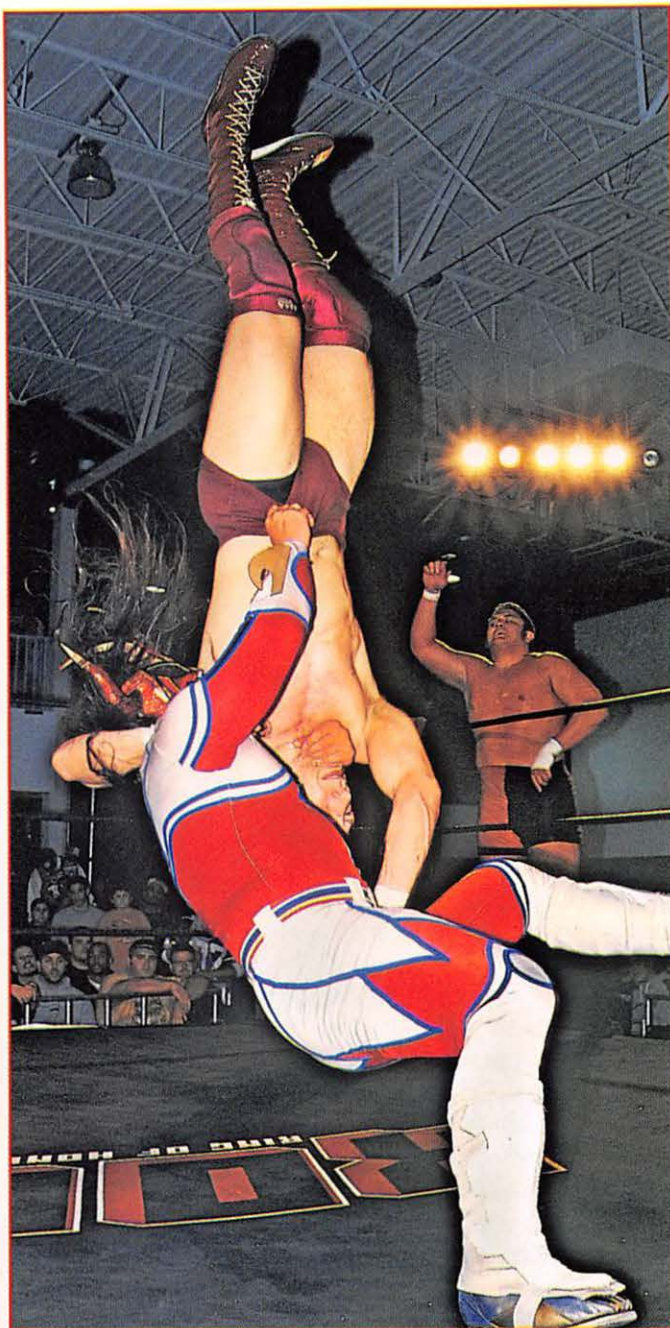
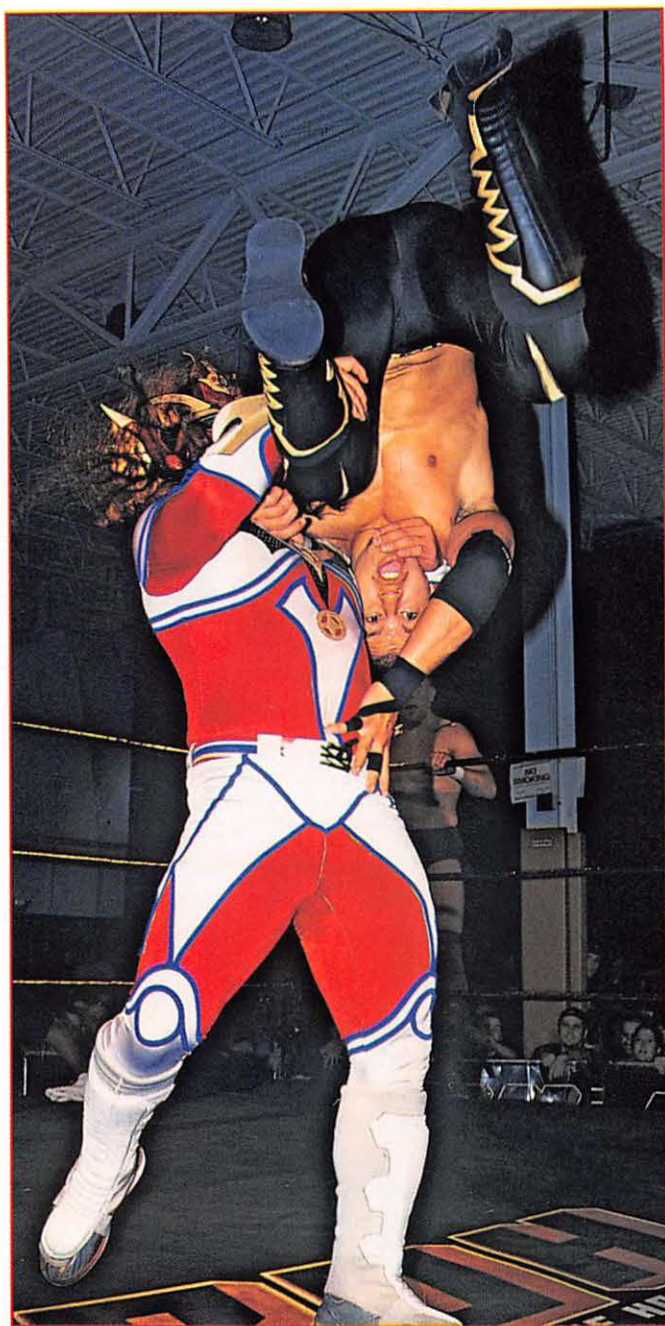


Ring of Honor fans in both Boston and New Jersey got to see a move that they had long been waiting to see in person: the Liger bomb. Liger executed it on Bryan Danielson both times, and Joe made sure he could.

# LIGER:

## His Search For The Perfect Partner Ends In Ring Of Honor





There were brainbuster suplexes waiting for both Low-Ki (above left) and Danielson (above right) during the "Weekend Of Thunder." The 11-time IWGP junior champ seemed very much at ease in ROH. He had the perfect guy watching his back.

an interpreter, helped to explain the situation.

"Samoa Joe has the very spark I'm looking for," he said. "One of the things I've always appreciated about certain men is their ability to wrestle their own style of match. There are many great wrestlers in the world, but few that wrestle the style they were truly born to wrestle. When I soar through the air, it's natural for me. It's the style I was meant to wrestle. Seeing Samoa Joe in the ring, I see the same thing. There is power and aggression and confidence. He's meant to wrestle the style he

wrestles. Also, his strengths perfectly blend with my own. He's the only partner I could possibly choose to stand by my side during my Ring of Honor tour."

When the time came for Liger to step onto a plane bound for the United States, he wasn't worried. His return was going to be monumental, and no one could or would stop him. With a partner like Samoa Joe standing guard, he believed none of the eager ROH blue-chippers would have a chance at catching him with his back turned.





Joe made sure Low-Ki couldn't save Danielson during a pin attempt in New Jersey (top), but Liger ultimately wrapped up the victory in the tag team match all by himself (above). His two-night return to the U.S. was a huge success.

The first night of the tour, Liger squared off with Danielson in a match that was highly anticipated in both the U.S. and Japan. Given the skills, intensity, reputation, and focus of both men, the contest couldn't possibly be a letdown.

It wasn't.

Liger vs. Danielson was epic in feel and downright

momentous for both Liger and Ring of Honor. The ovation that he received was far beyond what anyone had anticipated (and they anticipated a huge ovation). The finicky and sometimes-hostile ROH audience had given the Japanese high-flyer a hero's welcome. It was as if no time had passed since the last time he put his feet on American soil, as if he was being welcomed home. The emotion was overwhelming and the only thing left to do was to slay that Dragon. So that's what he did.

After a spectacular performance, one in which he escaped Danielson's cattle mutilation finisher before unleashing a Liger bomb and a top-rope brainbuster suplex, Liger had gained the respect and admiration of a whole new generation of American fans. He had made a solid statement, and there was Samoa Joe in his corner, making sure no one would stop him from making that statement.

He made another statement the following night at the Rex Plex in Elizabeth, New Jersey. On night two of the "Weekend Of Thunder," Liger had Samoa Joe as his tag team partner against a revenge-seeking Danielson and the dangerous Low-Ki. Once again, Joe didn't let his partner down. With the ROH champion

**"As is often the case with people who excel at their craft, Liger is a perfectionist. As if the search for a regular teammate wasn't intense enough, the search for the ideal partner for a heavily hyped tour seemed impossible. That is, until he saw Samoa Joe."**

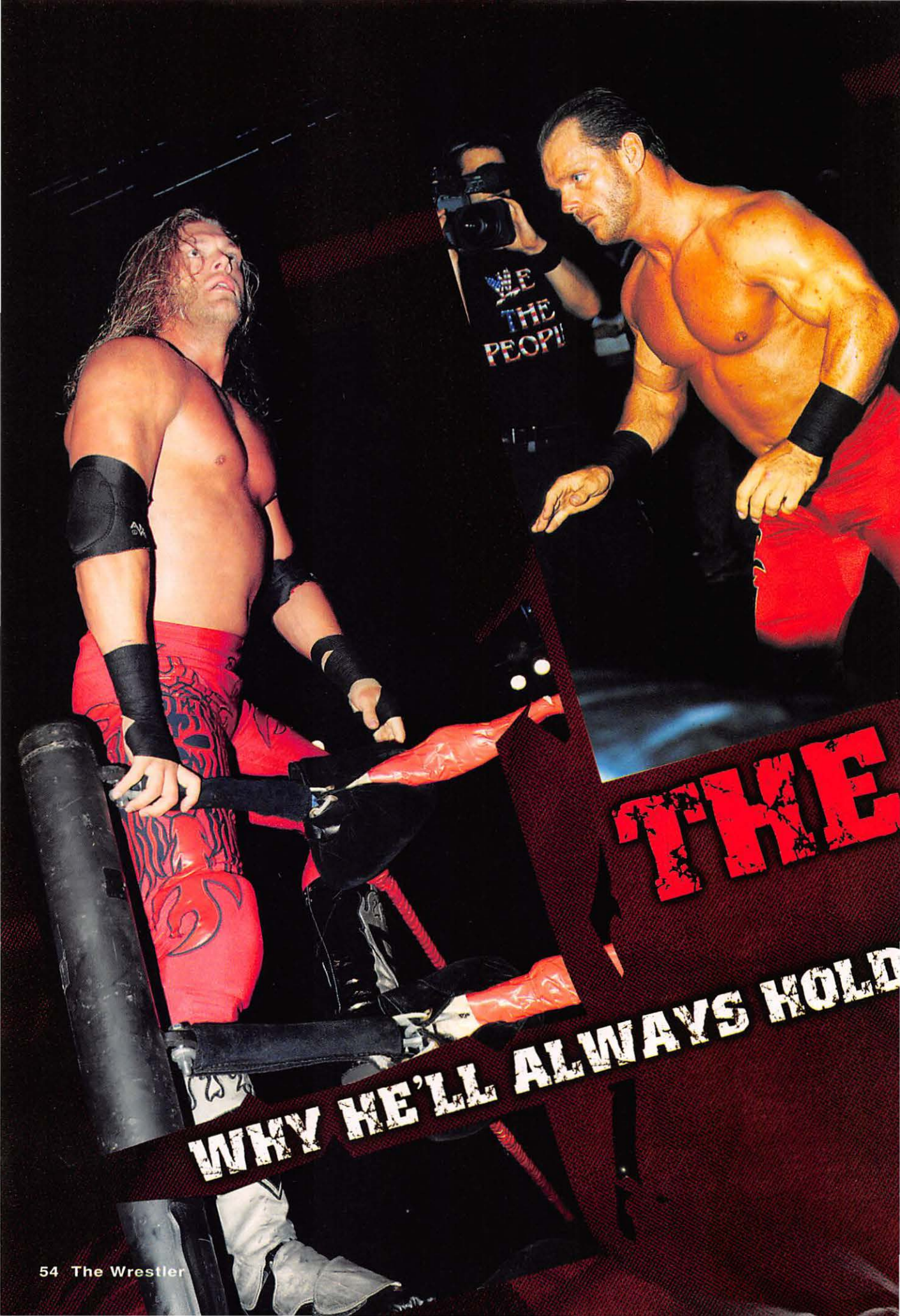
there to neutralize Low-Ki, Liger was able to hand Danielson the same fate on the second straight night and score another decisive pinfall.

"It was an honor just to stand in the ring with him," Joe would say later.

As he drifted off to sleep on the long plane trip home, Liger was happy with his choices. The "Weekend Of Thunder" had been a success and his goals had been reached. He owed gratitude to the fans. He owed gratitude to Ring of Honor. Most importantly, there was one man to whom he owed gratitude.

"I owe a lot to Samoa Joe," Liger offered through an interpreter. "I made the right choice and I'm glad I did. I couldn't ask for more from a partner, and I believe the best of Samoa Joe is yet to come. I only hope I can return the favor someday."





WE  
ARE  
THE  
PEOPLE

THE

WHY HE'LL ALWAYS HOLD



Ask **Edge** and he'll be glad to tell you all about how WWE matchmakers have held him down and kept him from tasting the championship glory he craves. He has a chance to back up his boasts against **Chris Benoit**. Benoit will also have a chance to make Edge choke on his words—and we're betting he will

Edge can expect to be in this position a few times as his feud with Chris Benoit progresses ... unless maybe he's more crafty and stealthy than we realize.



# EDGE IS BENOIT'S THE UPPER HAND IN THIS FEUD

By Dan Murphy

**I**N RETROSPECT, EDGE'S heel turn was inevitable. After spending a year on the disabled list recuperating from major spinal surgery, Edge returned to WWE intent on establishing himself as one of the top names on the Raw roster. During the months he was out of action, Triple-H's stranglehold on the Raw title was weakened, and Randy Orton emerged as one of the brand's top sensations. With Evolution fractured and Chris Benoit, Shawn Michaels, Eugene, and Shelton Benjamin lining up for title shots, Edge was desperate to return.

This is my time, this is my opportunity, was the silent mantra he repeated over and over in his mind. And without medical clearance, there's not a damn thing I can do about it.

For a man pegged as a superstar of the future for the past four years, he understood what Tom Petty meant when he sang that the waiting was the hardest part. Since Edge split with former tag team partner Christian, most observers thought he would quickly establish himself as a main event talent and mount a serious challenge for a world title.

It never quite happened. Instead, Edge got caught up in forgettable feuds and a short-lived tag team with Hulk Hogan, and he was sidelined by injuries. Nearly three years after the breakup of Edge and Christian, we still don't know whether Edge will ever become the breakout sensation



we thought he'd become. And Edge knows it.

Edge heard the clock ticking. He knew fans, match-makers, and other wrestlers were questioning his resolve and durability. And—truth be told—he was starting to question himself.

That's why he made sure he made an immediate impact on his return, quickly beating Orton to reclaim his beloved Intercontinental title. But when Orton rebounded from that loss to beat Benoit and win the Raw title at SummerSlam, Edge found himself at the breaking point.

He had come back from injury. He had slain Kane

without a problem. He had humbled the rising star and regained the I-C title. And he was no closer to reaching his potential as a main-eventer.

When Edge realized he had gone as far as he could by following his usual career path, a heel turn was the obvious move for him to make. And one obvious target for Edge to strike out against was Benoit.

Benoit, the man who returned from an injury extremely similar to Edge's and did more with fewer chances at WWE glory than Edge ever did. When Edge looks at Benoit, he sees his own failures reflected back at him.

Unfortunately for Edge, a feud with "The Crippler" is a huge mistake. And by the time Edge realizes it, it might be too late.

You can just see the anger, the bitterness, and the frustration etched on Edge's face as he knocks Sylvan Grenier into the ring barrier. Some wrestlers can channel those kinds of emotions effectively. We're not convinced Edge can and will.



**“Edge is approaching this feud like he needs to beat Benoit to take his career to the next step. In his mind, his entire career depends on him beating Benoit. When you put that much at stake in one feud, you don't find yourself wrestling to win. No, you find yourself wrestling not to lose, and that's where you make mental mistakes.” —Al Snow**





"There are some definite similarities between Edge and Benoit," WWE star/*Tough Enough* trainer Al Snow told *THE WRESTLER*. "Both guys came back from neck injuries, both guys had a tough time getting out of the mid-card shuffle, and both guys have had a lot of critics who wondered if they had what it takes to carry a company. The difference between them is that Benoit busted his tail and earned his title shot. He made people give him respect. Edge is putting all his effort into whining instead of doing what it takes to get ahead."

That's the fundamental difference between Edge and Benoit. Benoit earned respect and won over critics by competing in Japan, ECW, WCW, and, finally, WWE. It was a bumpy and slow road—at times agonizingly slow—but Benoit persevered. When promoters

said he was too bland and too small to make it as a main-eventer, he held his tongue and kept winning. When he got caught up in time-consuming feuds, he took care of the business at hand and always kept one eye on the big picture, winning the world championship he had coveted since childhood.

Edge, on the other hand, has demanded respect. He has begged for title shots, pleaded for recognition, and screamed for attention. His approach has been the exact opposite of Benoit's: Benoit slowly climbed to the top of the mountain and let his accomplishments speak for themselves; Edge has spent half his time winning matches and half his time bragging about winning those matches to anyone who would listen.

And that's why Benoit has the upper hand in this feud.

"Edge is approaching this feud like he needs to beat Benoit to take his career to the next step," Snow said. "In his mind, his entire career depends on him beating Benoit. When you put that much at stake in one feud, you don't find yourself wrestling to win. No, you find yourself wrestling not to lose, and that's where you make mental mistakes. Benoit has been around long enough not to get caught up in the emotion of one simple feud. Benoit's edge in experience and his fundamental approach to success will give him the advantage in this feud."

To be perfectly frank, Benoit also has a superior work ethic. He is

stronger than Edge, he is a more dangerous technical wrestler, plus he has more stamina, more experience, and a more explosive offense. Most importantly, Benoit has more composure than his frustrated adversary.

In the aftermath of this feud, one wrestler will be primed for a shot at the Raw championship, and one will suffer a setback that could send him spiraling back to the mid-card ranks.

Edge still has a lot to learn before he can become a world champion. And he had better be ready for Benoit to take him to school. □



It's not just because Benoit can execute a German suplex so flawlessly (left) that we give him an Edge over Edge. Heck, Edge is a damn good ring technician who can execute dropkicks and plenty of other moves flawlessly (above). "The Crippler" has a clear mental edge on Edge.





# 10 FOR THE ROAD

***A WWE Pink Slip Is  
Not The End Of  
The World***







By Will Welsh

**W**ITH THE ENTIRE industry still in a slump, WWE executives did something this fall that many industry insiders had expected of them for a very long time—they tidied up the promotion's main roster by cutting 10 well-known names. The purge started with Test, A-Train, and Billy Gunn, but by the time it was over, Chuck Palumbo, Johnny Stamboli, Rico, Rodney Mack, Jazz, Nidia, and Gail Kim were all looking for employment outside of WWE. Some of the cuts probably don't surprise you, but we're positive others do.

So goes the life of a professional wrestler. One day, you can be making a six-figure salary with the world's most popular promotion, and the next you can be wondering where your next paycheck will be coming from.

Takes a little glamour away from the sport, doesn't it?

What we're here to do is to analyze the situation of these newly minted free agents. We're going to look at what they accomplished with WWE and what they didn't accomplish that they should have.

We're also going to try our best to predict what their future holds. We don't have an all-seeing crystal ball, so our predictions probably won't be perfect, but we know the sport and we know what each of these wrestlers has to offer it.

The only promise we can make is to be fair and impartial.

## TEST

**WHAT HE ACCOMPLISHED:** In his six years with WWE, Test established himself as a strong physical presence both inside and outside of the ring. His mat skills were shaky early, but he eventually adapt-

Test: back when the neck heals?



ed, learning how to use his large frame and considerable strength to his advantage. Unfortunately, he didn't use his considerable physical tools to capture much championship gold. At the time of his release, he was recuperating from major spinal surgery. His recovery won't be complete until mid-2005 at the earliest.

**What he didn't accomplish:** Some people have charisma, and some don't. Test is part of the latter group. He tried his best, even allowing his girlfriend, Stacy Keibler, to try to develop a legion of fans known as Test-icles, but it didn't take. He never had a real strong connection with fans.

**His future:** Once his neck heals, we think Test will be back in WWE. He's popular with enough of the right people, and he still has the look to make it work. He didn't last six years just because.

## A-TRAIN

**What he accomplished:** If there's anyone who lasted longer than most insiders predicted, it was A-Train. During his five years with WWE, Train took his considerable bulk and proved that he was quite agile. His personality, while it never let him become a full-fledged fan favorite, didn't hold him back, either. He was a dependable but unspectacular all-around performer.

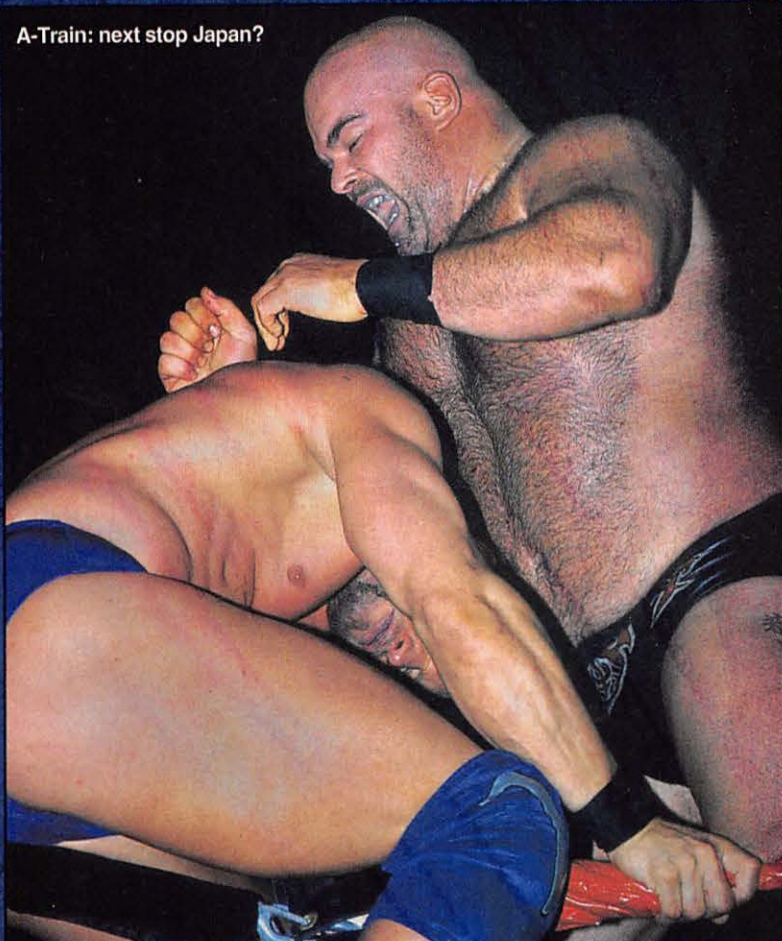
**What he didn't accomplish:** The only thing A-Train didn't accomplish was defeating the preconceived stereotype with which he entered the promotion. He was always better than he was perceived to be, and his failure to become anything other than a standard mid-level big man heel kept him stagnant far too long.

**His future:** Train could be a good fit for Japan's *gaijin*-happy Zero-One promotion. New Japan also might have him.

## BILLY GUNN

**What he accomplished:** Despite Gunn's poor reputation among much of the wrestling media, WWE kept him on the main roster for more than a decade for one reason: He excelled at his craft. No, he wasn't always the most pleasant person to be around, but in terms of in-ring ability, he was a natural. The company really soured on him

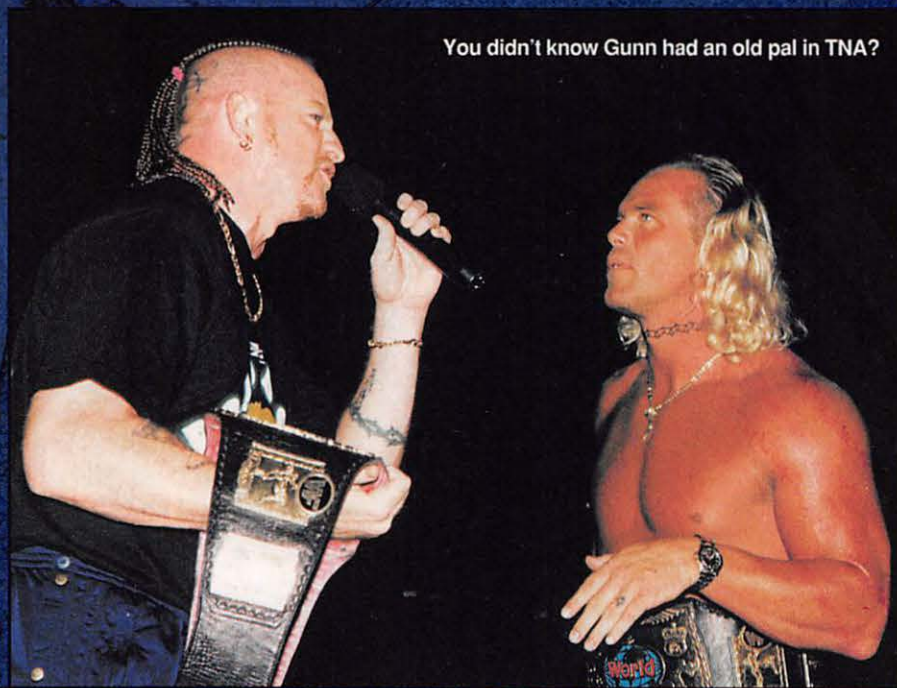
A-Train: next stop Japan?



during the last year, however, and his dismissal was no surprise.

**What he didn't accomplish:** Gunn's biggest success came as a tag team wrestler—first as a member of The Smokin' Gunns and later as a

You didn't know Gunn had an old pal in TNA?





member of The New Age Outlaws. Although WWE repeatedly tried hard to sell him as a main event-level singles talent, the promotion's audience never bought it. After 10 years and so many attempts to repackage him, he seemed like a 2004 wrestler stuck in the late-1980s.

**His future:** He has already been seen backstage at a TNA event. Don't be surprised if he feuds or teams with his former New Age Outlaws partner B.G. James.

## CHUCK PALUMBO

**What he accomplished:** When WWE bought out WCW in 2001, Palumbo was part of the package deal. He struggled with the transition early, but after he shook loose from Sean O'Haire, his partner in WCW, his career moved forward a bit. WWE viewed him as a team player too: Not only did he submit himself to becoming part of the silly Full-Blooded Italians group, who can forget his role in the whole Billy and Chuck storyline?

**What he didn't accomplish:** After splitting from O'Haire, Palumbo's in-ring skills as a singles wrestler should have improved, but they didn't. Too bad, because he has size and a decent look. He also never established himself as an individual talent, which was why he was kept in tag teams or groups throughout his career.

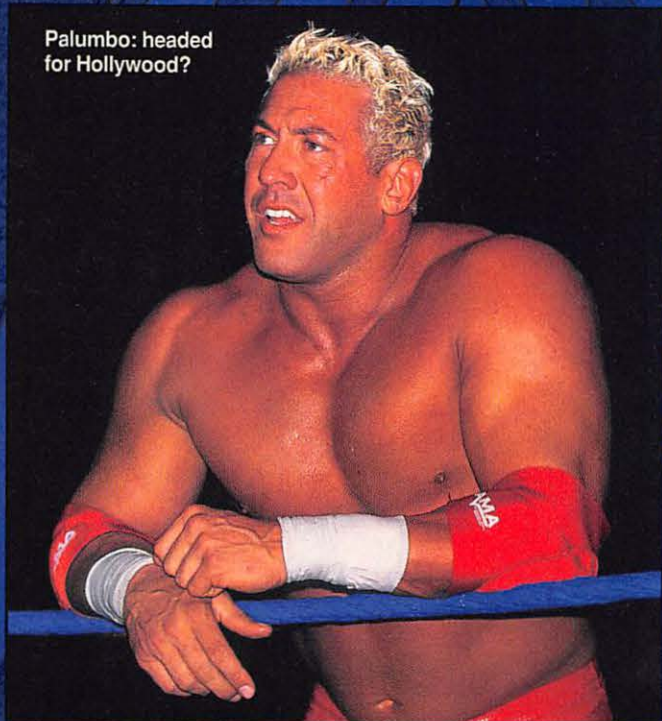
**His future:** At 33, Palumbo is still young enough to make this work, but for some reason we can't explain, we see him transitioning into a job as a Hollywood stuntman.

## JOHNNY STAMBOLI

**What he accomplished:** Stamboli, who broke into the sport as part of WCW's Natural Born Thrillers youth movement, was a decent role player at best in WWE. Perhaps the highlight of his WWE tenure was his 2002 defeat of Bradshaw for the hard-core title.

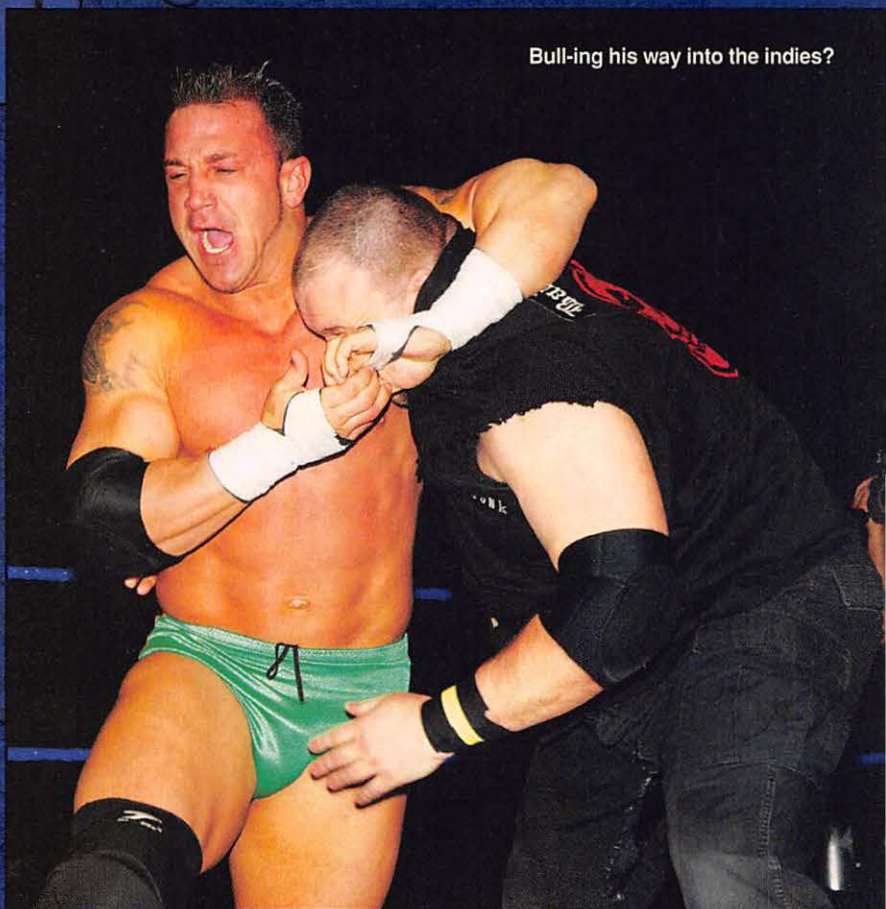
**What he didn't accomplish:** "The Bull" didn't show any ability to adapt and become better than he was when he arrived in WWE from WCW. That might be the fault of WWE Creative, who saw his classic Italian look and chiseled physique and decided to throw their imaginations out the window, but we have to believe that if Stamboli had shown them something, they would have found a way to work with him and improve his game.

Palumbo: headed for Hollywood?



**His future:** Stamboli is only 27, but if he wants to wrestle for WWE again, he's going to have to do things the hard way and improve on his own. A solid run on the independent circuit would go a long to show WWE executives that he's dedicated to getting better.

Bull-ing his way into the indies?





Rico: too old to start over?



## RICO

**What he accomplished:** Rico's release is one of the more shocking because he was in the middle of a successful program with Charlie Haas and Miss Jackie that seemed to have legs. He was also one of the best all-around wrestlers to have been fired, and he knew how to get a crowd into a match—even if he had to resort to a ridiculous gimmick in order to do so.

**What he didn't accomplish:** Unfortunately, as soon as Rico started wrestling as this decade's version of Adrian Adonis/Adrian Street, his career was put on a timer. Also, like many other people on this list, he was almost always a part of a tag team. He never developed into the singles wrestler WWE had hoped he would.

**His future:** Rico is 43. We're sorry to say this, but his career could be in jeopardy

... although we could see TNA giving him a chance.

## RODNEY MACK

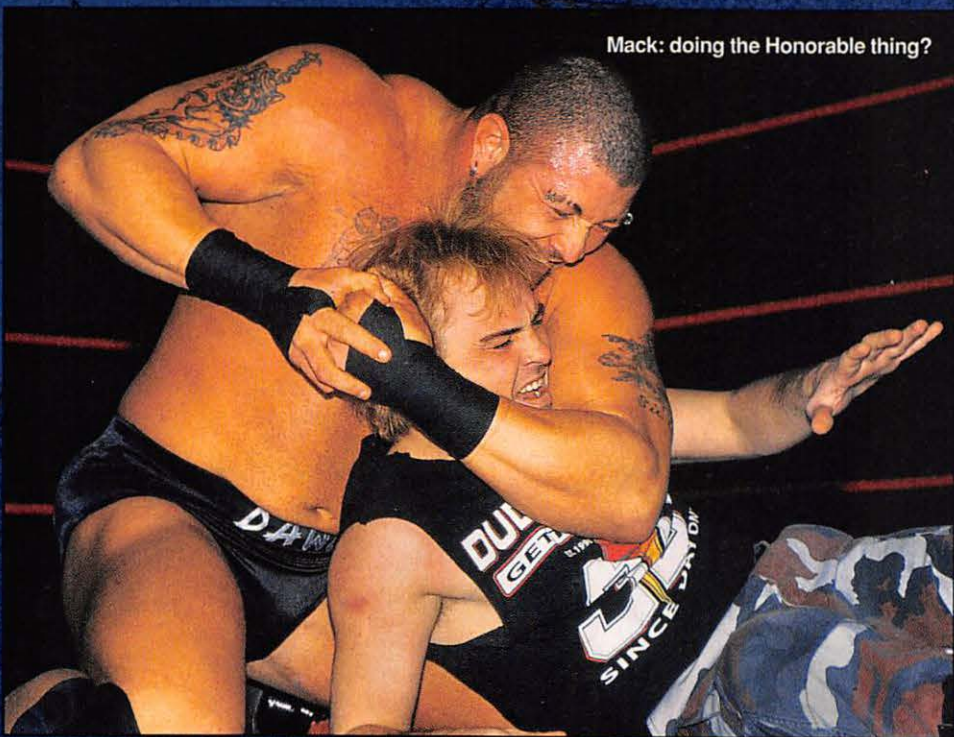
**What he accomplished:** Mack got himself over to a limited extent as an honest-to-God thug, which is very hard to do in today's somewhat over-the-top wrestling atmosphere. Wrestling fans believed that he was mean, nasty, and capable of smacking them right in their noggins as he made his way to the ring. He had his character down quite well.

**What he didn't accomplish:** Mack established himself as a thug all right, but a thug without a voice. His reliance on Teddy Long to cut his promos for him hurt his chances in WWE immensely. It was hard to take him seriously with Long constantly jabbering about "thuggin' and buggin'." Their two personalities didn't mesh, and Mack never recovered.

**His future:** Mack would be a good addition to Ring of Honor. He'd fit right in as a member of Julius Smokes' ferocious Rottweilers group.

## JAZZ

**What she accomplished:** One of the most talented female wrestlers in WWE history, Jazz proved that the women's division doesn't have to be focused solely on sex appeal and bra and



Mack: doing the Honorable thing?



Jazz: putting TNA divas on alert?



panties matches. Her intense persona and shoot-style wrestling technique provided the division with a sense of hardcore realism that it had always been lacking.

**What she didn't accomplish:** Nothing of which we're aware. As mentioned, Jazz is one of the most talented women wrestlers to have ever competed in a WWE ring. Even if she didn't have classic good looks, we're not sure what she did to earn her pink slip.

**Her future:** TNA has been struggling with legitimizing its female talent ever since the promotion's inception. Jazz could change all that by feuding with every one of TNA's divas and calling for the creation of a tournament to crown the promotion's first women's champion.

## NIDIA

**What she accomplished:** Nidia's country bumpkin character was easily our most favorite from a *Tough Enough* competitor yet. She poured her heart and soul into the character, and for her efforts, she was rewarded by a fan base that almost completely forgot she had earned her spot by winning a reality TV show.

**What she didn't accomplish:** Nidia never became the all-around wrestler that Al Snow and her other *Tough Enough* trainers hoped that she would become when they made her one of the two original *Tough Enough* champions. Her role was basically that of a valet and occasional competitor, and we're certain that WWE executives expected more out of her.

**Her future:** Nidia's wrestling career doesn't have to be over—not by a long shot. She'd be a good fit in Ring of Honor—where she could perhaps reunite with former WWE boyfriend Jamie Noble someday.

## GAIL KIM

**What she accomplished:** We bet you forgot that Kim captured the WWE women's title on her first night as a member of the main roster—which is why we're reminding you of that fact. Her wrestling ability allowed her to fit right in with the rest of the divas from the moment she arrived. Not often while wrestling did she look out of place or like she didn't belong. In fact, she could be pretty innovative.

**What she didn't accomplish:** For all of Gail's beauty (it has been argued that before she was let go, she was the most beautiful WWE diva of all), she never displayed much of a personality. If you can remember a promo she cut, well, you can remember one more than we can.

**Her future:** If she wants to continue to pursue a wrestling career, she'll find work, but we see her concentrating on fitness modeling from here on out. □

Gail & Nidia: going in different directions?





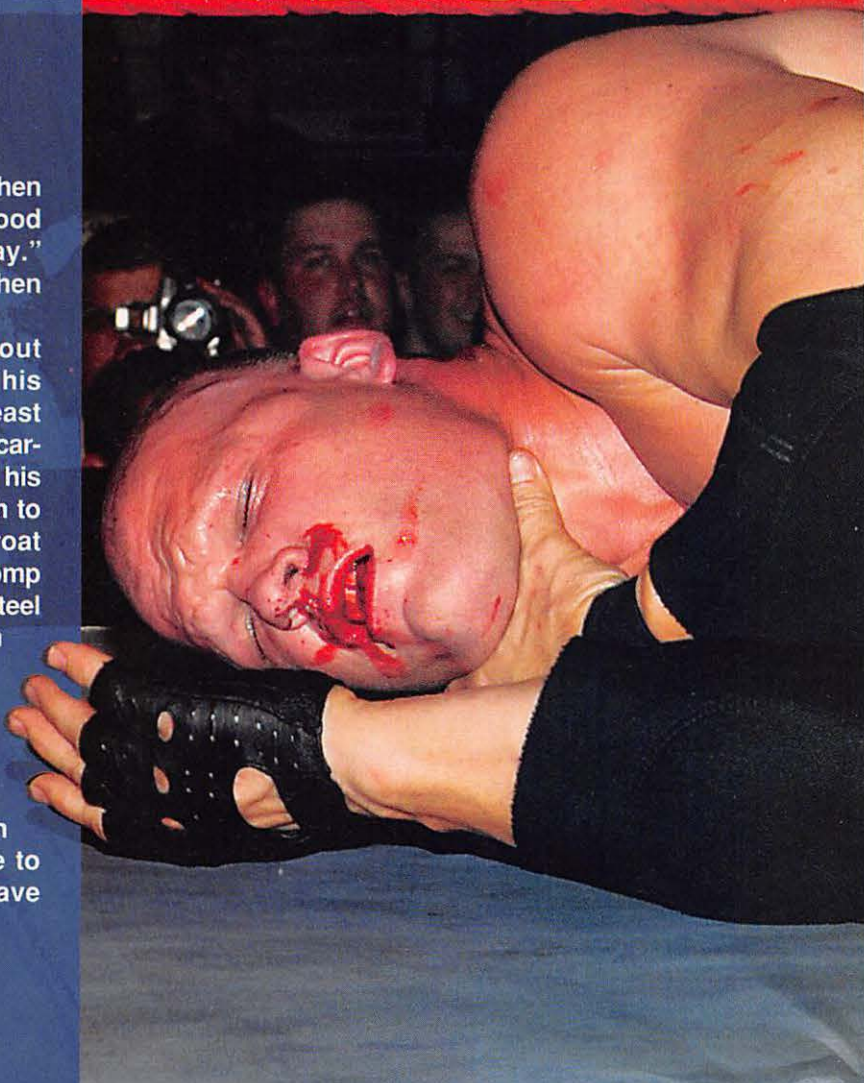
Fairly or not, Gene Snitsky has been accused of killing Lita and Kane's baby. He exacerbated the heinous act by injuring Kane as no man ever has. Now the whispers in the locker room are screaming into his psyche. Maybe, people are telling him, he didn't go far enough. Maybe...

# "HE SHOULD HAVE KILLED KANE"

By Frank Krewda

**F**RANK SINATRA ONCE sang, "When somebody loves you, it's no good unless he loves you all the way." Apparently, this advice also applies when you hate somebody.

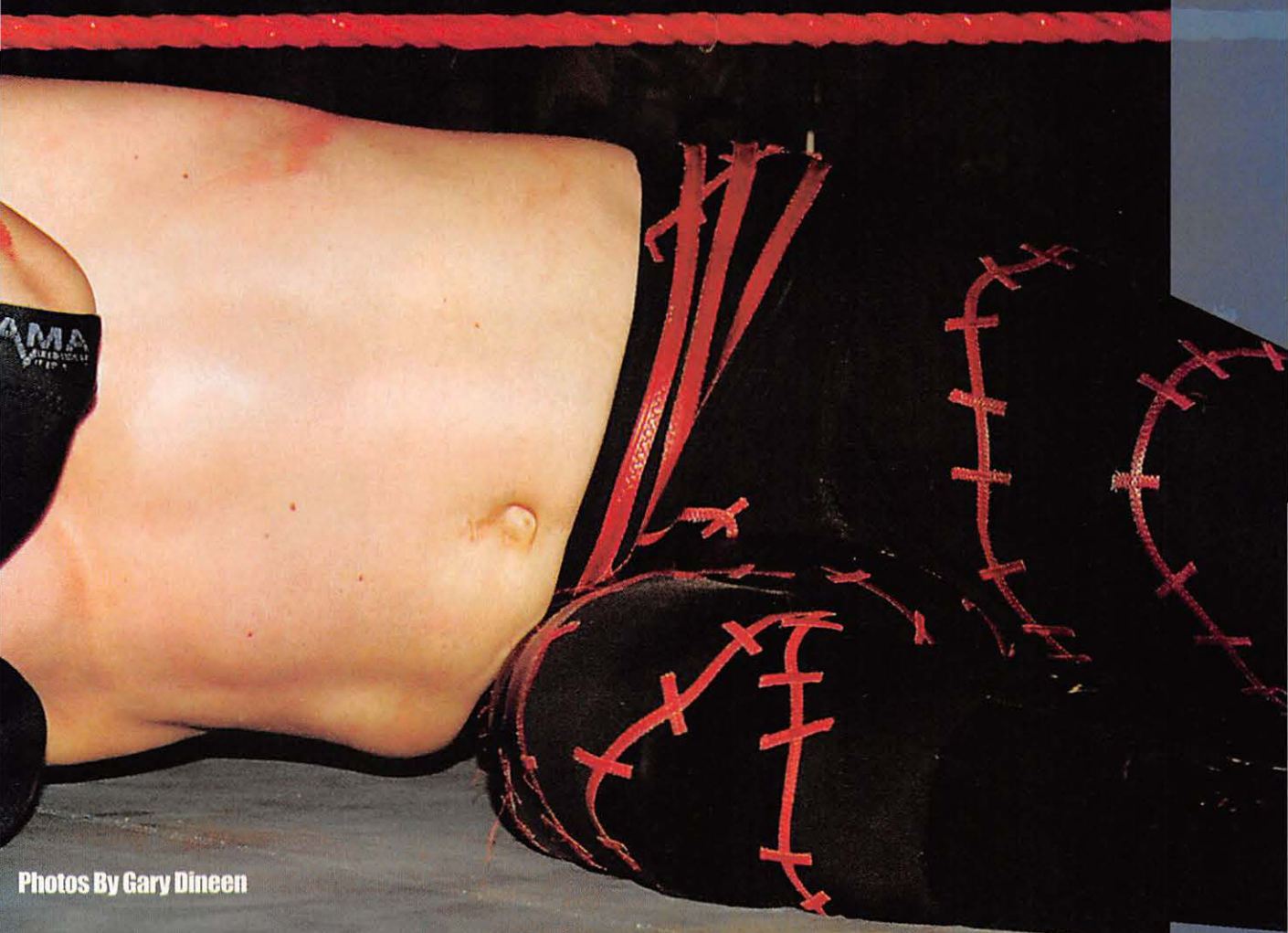
Gene Snitsky can expect to find out soon. He hated Kane enough to kill his baby (well, intentional or not, he at least played a big role in Lita suffering a miscarriage). He hated Kane enough to crease his skull with a pipe. He hated Kane enough to wrap a chair around his head and throat and then come flying off the ropes to stomp on it at the end of their Taboo Tuesday steel chain match. And he hated Kane enough to not only show no remorse as, bleeding, he was carried away on a stretcher, but to dump over the stretcher and stomp Kane some more. But with "The Big Red Machine" now on the mend and Snitsky's co-workers whispering in his ear about the retribution he'll have to pay, Snitsky probably wishes he'd have hated Kane "all the way."







Who would have ever thought just months ago that some Pennsylvania-based wrestler named Snitsky would not only be feuding with Kane on pay-per-view by the fall of 2004, but destroying him (above) and leaving him a bloody mess (below)? Well, he didn't quite destroy him when he had the chance ... and that might have been a fatal error.



Photos By Gary Dineen





Snitsky took a huge chance by mocking Kane over what happened to his unborn child ... and another by attacking him with a lead pipe and goading him into a grudge match. He got away with both. How many more chances can he take?

Snitsky knows the day is coming, but he doesn't know where or when Kane will show up to claim his pound of flesh. And until Kane returns, Snitsky quietly spends each night behind the WWE curtain in a cold sweat—a coiled ouch-cube of nerves ready to spring at the mere mention of his arch-rival's name. Now it looks as if Snitsky's state of agitation could paralyze his career—even before Kane does.

Perhaps Snitsky's first mistake was picking a fight with a man like Kane at all. Clearly, he saw an opportunity to make his mark in WWE right away by interjecting himself into the Kane-Lita love-hate relationship. But even on his best day, Snitsky's chances of emerging from a Kane feud with his body and mind intact seemed slim.

Look at the tale of the tape: Gene Snitsky is 6'4", 307, just three inches shorter and 20 pounds lighter than his arch-rival, but he's hardly as athletic as Kane. He gives away years in experience and reputation to one of WWE's most sadistic superstars. Head-to-head in any confrontation, Kane would have to be the odds-on favorite. Snitsky's lead pipe attack in early-October belies his own understanding of who the better man really is. And his victory over Kane two weeks later at Taboo Tuesday was clearly one of the upsets of the year.

While Snitsky might be impressed with his own self-styled sadism (i.e. his mocking, cavalier attitude toward Lita's miscarriage) it's most unlikely he would ever intimidate Kane, even given what he has already done to him. Men who burn other people and laugh about it don't scare easily.

Another "rookie" mistake the WWE rookie made:

He's managed to turn off his co-workers. Sure, wrestling heels come in all shapes and size, and each has his own threshold for villainous behavior, but openly celebrating the death of an unborn baby to springboard his career is a trick that even the most capricious villain would have difficulty embracing. So rather than win allies against Kane, he's alienated himself. Heck, he blew a great opportunity to gain some backup when he blew off an admiring Triple-H, one of his tag team partners, by telling him he wanted a shot at his Raw title more than he wanted any kind of alliance with Evolution. Hence the smug whispers of what awaits Snitsky when Kane returns.

In fact, Chris Jericho has been so outraged by Snitsky's treatment of Lita that he attacked him during a recent installment of "The Highlight Reel" on *Raw*.

"Aw, Snitsky's feeling the heat? Good, I'm glad. I hope he's walking around on pins and needles," Jericho said. "The way that ass clown has been acting is atrocious. If he's got a beef with Kane, that's fine. I've been in the ring with Kane, and he'll take care of this. If Snitsky

expected to last long in WWE, then he should have killed Kane. And now, to rub all that he did in Lita's face? Enough already."

WWE superstars—including Jericho—are also sore that Snitsky might have unwittingly kicked off a maelstrom of violence that will affect everyone in WWE. They know that an angry Kane is a dangerous Kane, and they've lived through previous episodes of *Raw* that Kane turned upside-down with random acts of



Kane will choke-slam people with whom he has no real beef. If you recall, he's also been known to set them on fire. Snitsky has probably considered that by now and probably isn't sleeping too soundly as a result.



horrifying violence. The last thing anyone wants is to see Kane's extreme bloodlust unleashed again.

While it might seem odd that the majority of WWE wrestlers would throw their support behind Kane, a man they fear and despise as much as they respect, it's not so surprising when you consider Snitsky's biggest mistake. He failed to finish Kane off when he had the chance. Cheering for a severe or fatal injury to be commissioned in the course of a match seems like bad religion, but throwing out a challenge and not backing it up all the way is far worse religion in wrestling circles.

Failing to tame Kane, then continuing to hound Lita, has positioned Snitsky as the ultimate "punk." And the palpable fear he radiates undercuts his credibility all the more. Instead of being the force he pretended to be when he first arrived, Snitsky now looks like he ingested way more than he was capable of chewing. Like the animals they must sometimes act like in the ring, wrestlers can smell fear, and they detest it. Nothing compromises a wrestler's standing among his peers more

"The sum total of Snitsky's mistakes has landed him on the island of his mind, and from all outward appearances, the beach is eroding at an alarming pace. He's under tremendous pressure to deal with several stark realities—and time's running out. He has a madman waiting to chase him down, and worse, no allies willing to watch his back."

than fear, the unforgivable weakness.

The sum total of Snitsky's mistakes has landed him on the island of his mind, and from all outward appearances, the beach is eroding at an alarming pace. He's under tremendous pressure to deal with several stark realities—and time's running out.

He has a madman waiting to chase him down, and worse, no allies willing to watch his back. Couple those factors with the realization that he didn't get done the job of removing Kane and one can understand why Snitsky has failed to progress beyond his current status in WWE. And most frustrating of all, Snitsky has only himself to blame—all the way. □

Snitsky delighted in using a chair to finish off "The Big Red Machine" at Taboo Tuesday (left and below). Too bad for him Kane will be back from his injuries. We've seen Kane at his sadistic worst, and we don't like it.





TOTAL NONSTOP ACTION

WRESTLING

**Our Blueprint For  
An Interpromotional  
Showdown!**

**VS.**  
**ROH**  
RING OF HONOR

By Will Welsh

**R**EMEMBER BACK IN the day, when we had the WWF, WCW, and ECW? Oh, those were wrestling's glory days. With three different national promotions, three different rosters, and three different world champions, the writers and editors of this magazine were fat and happy.

Back then, our jobs were easy. Outside of the normal intrapromotional stories, we'd frequently run interpromotional stories that would speculate on what would transpire if wrestling's promotions somehow overcame their differences and decided to work together. The stories, dream matches, and dream cards that we came up with were always fun to write, read, analyze, and debate. They captured our attention, and we know that they were some of your favorite features of the magazines—because only in the pages of THE WRESTLER and its sister magazines could those matches and cards ever take place.

However, looking back, we realize that we weren't too realistic. Prior to WWE's purchase of WCW, the chances of "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin and Bill Goldberg squaring off were next to nil. Prior to ECW's demise, the chance of Rob Van Dam stepping up to challenge anyone in either WCW or WWE was pretty darn nonexistent too. And we're 99 percent sure that Paul Heyman, Eric Bischoff, and Vince McMahon never would have stood in the same ring together. How things have changed. Now all three of those men work together under the WWE banner. It's been a while since we've discussed possible interpromotional matches or cards. No matter what WWE would like us to think, Raw champion vs. WCW champion. One of the reasons for this same magical quality as WWF champion vs. Smackdown champion doesn't have the Vince McMahon could make that match tomorrow with a couple of phone calls, but another reason is although Raw and Smackdown are separate brands, they've never established distinct identities. Any rivalry between the two sides is for show only. However, we're glad to report that there is still plenty of animosity in the wrestling world. Total Nonstop Action and Ring of Honor don't get along—not even a little





The obvious choice for the main event of a TNA-ROH supercard would be NWA champ Jeff Jarrett (left) vs. ROH champ Samoa Joe (below). For several reasons, we don't want to see that.



Any talk of WWF vs. WCW is long gone. But there are two prominent promotions out there that have given us a reason to seriously discuss an interpromotional card. And TNA and Ring of Honor hate each other just enough to make it must-see!





The C.M. Punk-Raven feud played out in ROH and TNA last year ... before Punk left TNA and Raven left ROH. A final interpromotional showdown between them would be intriguing.

bit. TNA has a national TV clearance and has placed its hope for a profitable future on pay-per-view, while Ring of Honor continues to promote itself through the selling and distribution of tapes and DVDs of its shows. Even though they're not direct competition to each other, a number of TNA-contracted wrestlers were barred from appearing on anymore Ring of Honor shows a few months ago, and ROH wrestlers have been known to make disparaging marks about TNA during ROH shows.

Believe it or not, this animosity has opened the door to a potential blockbuster interpromotional showcase. There's more money to be made by coming together (at least for a night or two) than by staying apart.

Before we begin discussing how to do this, it's important to discuss what *can't* happen on the card: There can be no interpromotional matches between champions. Pitting the NWA champion against the ROH champion, no matter who they are, wouldn't do

either promotion any good, as we'd be unlikely to get a decisive winner. At the first sign that the NWA champ might lose the match, TNA wrestlers would empty out of the back and force the referee to call for the bell. The same would happen if the ROH champion got himself into serious trouble. The result would be a fan base ticked off at both of them for robbing them of a satisfying outcome to their dream match.

So, here we go: No NWA champion vs. ROH champion match, no TNA X champion vs. ROH pure wrestling champion match, and no NWA tag team champions vs. ROH tag team champions match. Write them all off now, and forget about them.

Now that we've gotten what can't happen out of the way, here's what has to happen: Begin with a small, unannounced invasion of select TNA talent into an ROH show. It can't be the other way around, because ROH has something that TNA has yet to prove it has: a rabid, loyal fan base. While there are thousands of TNA fans who care a lot about the product, it's not too much of a stretch to

**"Begin with a small, unannounced invasion of select TNA talent into an ROH show. It can't be the other way around, because ROH has something that TNA has yet to prove it has: a rabid, loyal fan base ... it's not too much of a stretch to say that every single, solitary ROH fan lives and dies with ROH."**



Monty Brown might be the perfect man to lead a TNA invasion of ROH. He's big, he's aggressive, he's charismatic, and we bet the Ring of Honor faithful would be quick to loathe him.





It could be tough to use A.J. Styles on such an interpromotional supercard. TNA fans love him, but ROH fans would surely welcome him back in a second, so it'd be tough to get anyone to hate him.

say that every single, solitary ROH fan lives and dies with ROH. It's one of the only reasons ROH survived the Rob Feinstein scandal. It has an ECW-like cult following—and a TNA invasion would be big news for it and its fans. They'd be hopping mad and ready for revenge.

An ROH invasion of TNA wouldn't have the same juice. Not only doesn't TNA have the same cult following, there's the possibility that the invading ROH stars would get lost amongst the Jeff Jarretts, Scott Halls, and Kevin Nashes of TNA.

Again, it must start with a limited TNA invasion of ROH. Any other way simply won't work.

After a few months of well-organized interpromotional booking (we could write a dissertation on what would have to happen during this juncture of the partnership), it would be time for an actual TNA-ROH pay-per-view.

Why pay-per-view? TNA's bread and butter is its newly revamped pay-per-view schedule. Its clearance on Fox Sports Net is nice, but a pay-per-view schedule with profitable buy rates is the promotion's future. It can't endanger that in any way.

ROH hasn't been on pay-per-view, and if ROH executives are telling the truth, there is no plan to take the

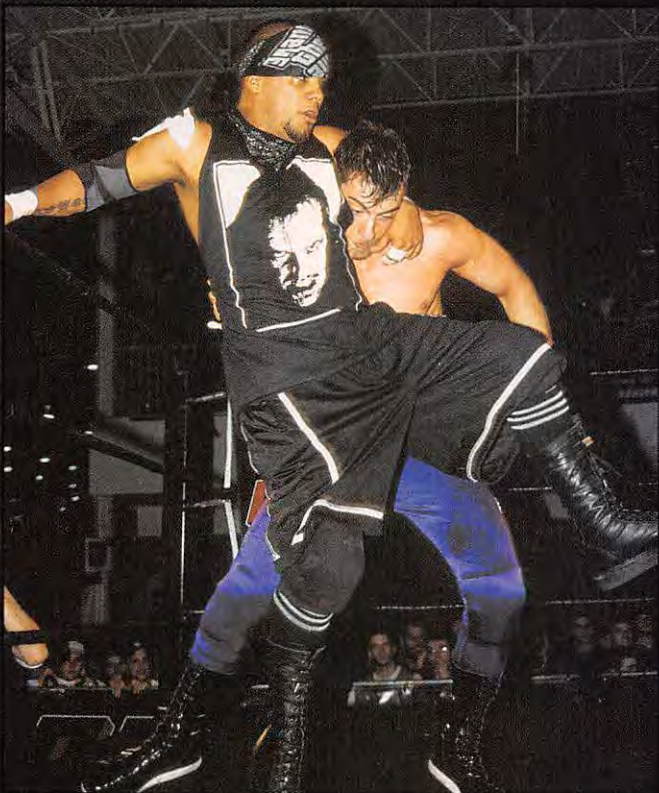
promotion to pay-per-view. Instead, ROH continues to market itself through the sale of its tapes. In fact, at this point, ROH doesn't even expect to make money from ticket sales—it only seeks to break even on its live events, which is why pay-per-view is the perfect format for this joint TNA-ROH production.

TNA should market the pay-per-view and claim most of the profits—if, and only if, TNA executives agree to allow ROH to market the videotape and DVD of the pay-per-view and retain most of the profits from that.

No, it's not a perfect system to make this happen, but it's the best idea we've seen.

As for the card itself, we'd want to see a few TNA vs. ROH interpromotional matches, but not too many. Three at most to make them all seem special. Pick some of the young high-flyers from both promotions and let them go at it. Pick two wrestlers with a history, such as C.M. Punk and Raven, and provide them with a stage to finish their epic feud. Simply pick two wrestlers who would make interesting opposition for each other and give them half an hour to compete.

The key to a successful TNA vs. ROH card would be to make sure that the fans got as much out of it as possible while also showcasing TNA and ROH as equals. Both promotions would need to come out of the pay-per-view looking stronger than they went in. The whole process wouldn't be easy, but as we've just shown, it could be done. TNA, ROH, it's up to you to make it happen. □



ROH could benefit a lot from working with TNA. Some of its lesser-known stars—outstanding wrestlers like Homicide and John Walters—would get some valuable national exposure.



# HEYMAN ENTERS



Heidenreich really doesn't seem to have any fear of The Undertaker whatsoever. His manager, Paul Heyman, might soon start wondering if that's a good sign or a bad sign.

Photos By Gary Dineen



# HEIDENREICH HELL

**"I've Dealt With Monsters Before, But Nothing Like This"**

**Paul Heyman will manage any man he thinks he can ride to the top of WWE. He thinks Heidenreich has the potential to get there, but the madman's mental instability has him wondering whether he—Heyman—could survive the journey**

**By Liz Hunter**

**A**PERPLEXED PAUL HEYMAN sat in his hotel room, quietly contemplating his decision to take on the management of Heidenreich. The lights were dimmed, and the TV was tuned to CNN with the volume low to provide background chatter. A half-eaten plate of food, ordered from room service, sat on his king-sized bed. Heyman would glance over at the plate every once in a while, but his mind kept returning to his job at hand. It kept returning to Heidenreich.

After this evening, Heyman wasn't sure what he wanted to do with Heidenreich. Heck, he wasn't even sure that he wanted to continue managing the man. Heyman saw in him the potential for greatness—but what he didn't see was the right way to coax that potential out of him. He had no idea how to implement any kind of effective control. The straitjacket was a start, but that only allowed Heyman to control Heidenreich's movements in and around the ring. As physically overpowering as Heidenreich is, Heyman knows that the bigger issue at hand is controlling Heidenreich's frail mental psyche. It's not like Heidenreich's brain is on a leash.

Earlier in the evening, while in the ring against Charlie Haas, Heidenreich forgot all about the match and hopped over the ringside barrier. As the referee counted to 10, giving Haas a meaningless win, Heidenreich curled into the fetal position and began talking to himself.





Just look at the ferocity with which Heidenreich attacks the 'Taker (above). It's no wonder he needs to be placed in a straitjacket (below). But a straitjacket does nothing to control his mind. No one can control his mind or comprehend how it works.



"I didn't lose! I didn't fail!" Heidenreich repeated, still broken up about his Survivor Series loss to The Undertaker. He kept this up until he started mumbling incoherent nothings and seemed on the verge of passing out. Finally, he calmed down enough that Heyman was able to coax him into the backstage area, but the damage had been done.

The entire Smackdown locker room had seen Heidenreich's breakdown. Everyone now knew he wasn't mentally stable (though most probably had a good idea of that even before the breakdown), and

**"If [Heyman is] going to work with Heidenreich, he's going to have to get inside the monster's head and maybe force him to mature. He can't bring himself to walk away, and yet he shivers in fear over what might happen if he doesn't."**

everyone would try to use that to his own advantage. Somehow, Heyman was responsible for turning this situation around.

"I've dealt with monsters before, but nothing like this," Heyman said while contemplating how he was going to get himself out of this latest mess. "Heidenreich has a lot of raw talent, a lot of physical gifts, but he's unsculpted—and his ego is close to that of a child. He can only focus on one thing at one time, and if he fails in that focus, he's just about incompetent in every other area of his life. He could be my greatest client, a human wrecking machine, but I just don't know. He's a monster, yes, but he's like no monster I've ever been around or even seen, because he has an innocent side."

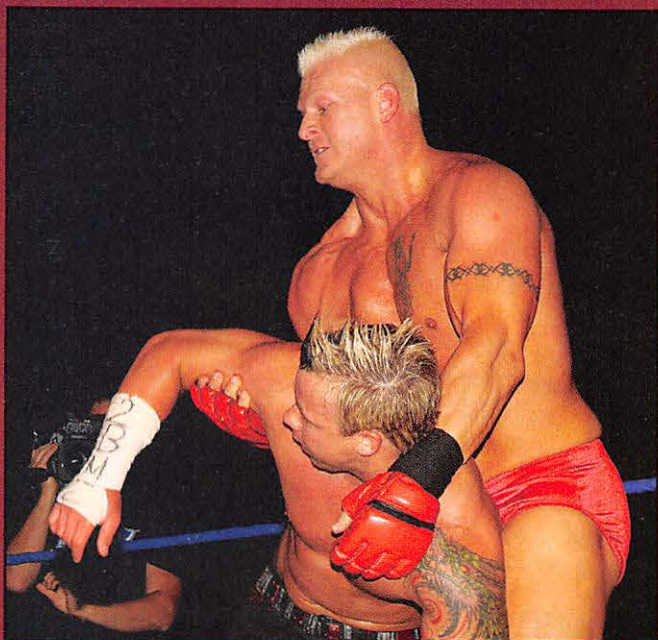
Heidenreich? An innocent side? Yes, we know, it sounds like Heyman's devious way of trying to ingratiate himself and Heidenreich to the wrestling public, a ploy by a man who knows everything there is to know about psychological warfare and about deceiving opponents and fans, but there might be some truth in Heyman's words.

As sadistic and dangerous and menacing as he is, all Heidenreich wants to do is please. He can't stand to be looked upon as a failure, or as someone Heyman can't count on to get the job done. He has no room in his mind for disappointment. He not only needs to prove his worth to himself, he also needs to prove it to those who care about him ... or at least pretend to care about him.

Right now, rightly or wrongly, Heidenreich sees the manipulative Heyman as the only person looking out for him.

Heyman, for his part, has no idea how to mold Heidenreich into a successful wrestler. He's dealt with maniacs in the past, including the most homicidal, suicidal, and genocidal wrestler ever to compete in the sport: Sabu. Heyman, though, knew how to control





Manhandling someone like Shannon Moore isn't even close to a challenge for Heyman. Physically, he could overpower anyone in WWE. Mentally, well, that's where he has some scary problems. Very scary, according to Heyman.

**Sabu:** He unleashed him in the ring and let him go about his business. No, their relationship wasn't always pretty, but because Heyman knew Sabu's innermost desire—to enter the ring and create as much mayhem as possible—he was able to effectively control the madman when he managed him in ECW.

Heyman's different than Sabu, perhaps more complex. Even though Sabu never spoke in the ring, he was certainly easier for Heyman to read than Heidenreich currently is. What does he want? What are his goals, his dreams? Does he have any at all? What's happening in his head? How does his mind work? It's Heyman's job to figure these things out—and the longer he goes without finding the answers, the more he's putting himself in harm's way.

"Heyman understands what Heidenreich is capable of," said wrestling psychologist Dr. Sidney M. Basil. "He's seen little flashes of what he can do when he's angry. Because of this, he's scared of him. Heyman doesn't know what is going to force the big man to finally snap—or when or if it's going to happen. Heyman also knows that he doesn't want to be around when it does happen, but every time he counsels him backstage or walks with him to the ring, he's at risk."

Some people in the Smackdown locker room are wondering if Heyman has aligned himself with a wild card like Heidenreich because he feels like he's losing backstage stroke. Others view it as an opportunity for Heyman to try to capitalize on past successes with other big, monstrous men. Remember, earlier in his WWE

tenure, Heyman molded the careers of The Big Show and Brock Lesnar—and he received a lot of the credit for their successful performances.

However, those relationships were also different than his current one. First, like Sabu, he knew their motivations. He knew titles, money, and glory were their ultimate goals, the be-all and end-all of their existence. He also knew that even though Show and Lesnar could have done him grievous harm when he was working for them, neither of them had a hair trigger. Heyman knew when he was annoying them. He knew when he needed to step away and not push them any more. His ability to read their psyches acted as an internal alarm—one that allowed him to back away before they took their frustrations out on him.

Heyman can't read Heidenreich, which is why he can't control him. He'd like to advise him from afar, but he knows that won't work, either. If he's going to work with Heidenreich, he's going to have to get inside the monster's head and maybe force him to mature. He can't bring himself to walk away, and yet he shivers in fear over what might happen if he doesn't.

"What I told Heidenreich was true," Heyman said. "The Undertaker was more scared of him than he was of The Rock, of Steve Austin, and even Hollywood Hogan. 'Taker gave him a beating like he's given no one else, and Heidenreich came back for more. He refused to quit. I can't be expected to walk away from the only person who has ever made The Undertaker afraid, can I?"

Well, Mr. Heyman, that's a question you're going to have to answer for yourself ... and soon. □



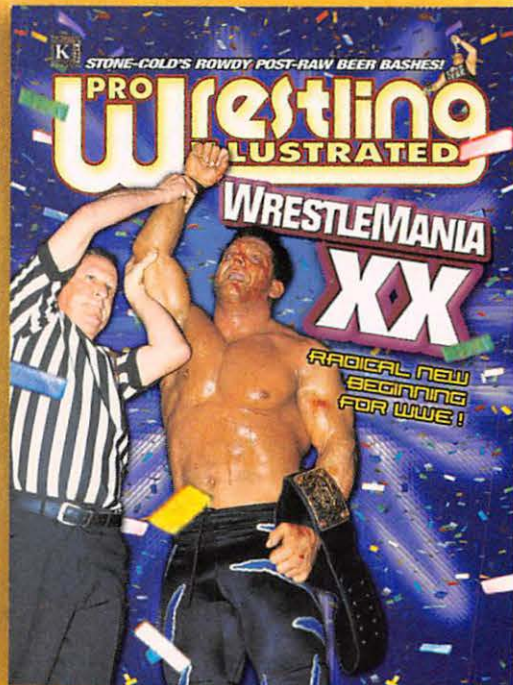
Heyman wonders whether he will suffer the same fate as Rico is suffering here—or worse—at some point. And it's not like him to admit he fears someone he manages.

Photo By Duane Long



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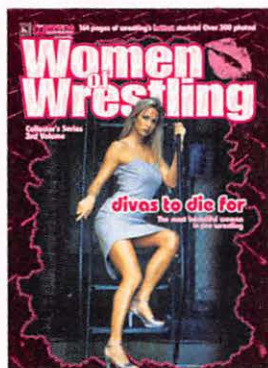
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## WHAT'S HAPPENING

(Continued from page 7)



You can read about Jushin Liger's success in Ring of Honor on page 50. Wouldn't it be great if we all got to see him in WWE before he retired?

Laree (with **Passion**) pinned **Jillian Hall** (with **Melissa Coates**) ... Skyfire, Johnson, **Johnny Jeter**, and **Matt Cappotelli** beat **Da Beast**, **Mike Mondo**, **Romeo Roselli**, and **Promise Thomas** in an eight-man tag ... The exciting **Elijah Burke** defeated Hassan ... **Ken Doane** beat Matthews in a strap match ... **Jim Cornette** interviewed **Randy Orton** ... **Eugene** pinned **Robert Conway** ... OVW heavyweight champion **Chris Cage** pinned **Chad Toland** ... **The Basham Brothers** defeated

Here's an interesting rumor: **Jushin Liger**, who was sensational when he faced "**American Dragon**" **Bryan Danielson** on two Ring of Honor cards in the Northeast in November, has reportedly told friends he would like to end his career in WWE. Liger was instrumental in popularizing cruiserweight wrestling in the U.S. with his stints in WCW in the early- and mid-1990s. I'm not sure if there's any truth to the rumor, but a series between him and **Rey Mysterio Jr.** for the WWE cruiserweight title would

**Chris Masters** and **The Blue-print** (**Matt Morgan** under a mask).

**Linda McMahon** and WWE Chief Financial Officer **Phil Livingston** recently talked with investors in a state of WWE conference call. McMahon admitted PPV business is down but blamed the low buy rate for **Taboo Tuesday** on competition from the Major League Baseball playoff series between the Yankees and Red Sox. She also said WWE 24/7 will start in earnest soon and noted that WWE has acquired two new movie scripts. She did not give any specifics on those movies, but said they will be released in 2006.

be the stuff of legends.

WWE is planning to merchandise a Randy Orton clothing line to be called "Randy Wear." I wonder if that clothing line comes with a belt ... **Steve Austin** reportedly has been in talks with the WWE front office regarding a possible return. Speculation is he'll be back by **WrestleMania XXI** ... Finally, **Jake "The Snake" Roberts** has been convicted in England of causing unnecessary cruelty to his pet snake, which died after being removed from Roberts' home. According to court testimony, the male Burmese python had not been fed for several months, suffered from mouth rot, and was kept in an unsuitable tank in the garage of his home. Roberts received a substantial fine and community service.

That's what's happening. Catch ya again next issue. □



After all these years, Jake "The Snake" Roberts is still making news because of his reptiles. The most recent news he made in England wasn't positive.



# BACK ISSUES OF the Wrestler

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**Aug. 1980:** The Reign Of Bloodshed Begins: Stevens & Valentine Win The NWA Tag Team Title! Also: Kerry Von Erich, Backlund & Skaaland, Nick Bockwinkel, Zbyszko-Bruno, Keirn-Muraco, Samoans, Wrestling II-Idol.

**June 1981:** Bruno Sammartino: "I Want To Break Stan Hansen's Neck!" Also: Ted DiBiase, Garea & Martel, Mike Graham, Mongolian Stomper, Piper-Superstar, Verne Gagne, Tommy Rich.

**Sept. 1980:** Why Ernie Ladd Says ... "I'm Tired Of Being Your King." Also: Rick Steamboat, Mad Dog Vachon, Bugsy McGraw, Patera-Patterson, Manny Fernandez, Bob Backlund, Greg Gagne, Mike Sharpe.

**Feb. 1981:** Larry Zbyszko's Claim: "Tony Garea Begged Me Not To Hurt Him!" Also: The Grappler, Race-Patera, Hussein Arab, Humpderink-Rhodes, Gilberts, Mr. Wrestling II, Bravo-Bockwinkel.

**Oct. 1981:** Is The Funk Family At War? Why Terry Funk And Dory Funk Jr. Were Forced To Wrestle. Also: Backlund-Patterson-Mosca, Harley Race, Rhodes-Khan, Kevin Sullivan, Flair-Patera, Verne Gagne.

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**Jan. 1983:** Ivan Putski Humiliates Cowboy Bob Orton: Can The NWA Champion Be Allowed To Choose His Challengers? Also: Ivan Koloff, Bruiser Brody, Kerry Von Erich, Andre-Kamala, Brazil-Valentine, Gagne-Martel.

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Dino Bravo, Fabulous Ones, Garvin & Sunshine.

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**Aug. 1984:** Garvin vs. Roberts: "Hands Of Stone" Crushes "The Snake." Also: Freebirds-Devastation Inc., Sawyer-Sullivan, Lawler & Dillon, McDaniel-Race.

**Nov. 1984:** The \$50,000 Full-Nelson Challenge Match: Billy Jack Gets Bloody Revenge Against Superstar Graham. Also: Roddy Piper, Heenan & Saito, Brody & Hansen, Kerry Von Erich.

**Dec. 1984:** The Tully Blanchard-Rick Steamboat Feud: Will Dusty Rhodes End It ... Or Make It Worse? Also: Tito Santana, Martel-Atlas, D. Funk, Mike Von Erich, Williams-Taylor.

**Jan. 1985:** Kerry Von Erich: "I've Got Ric Flair's NWA Title Within My Grasp." Also: Albano & Lauper, Koloffs & Kernodle, Road Warriors, Lawler & Rude, Scott McGhee.

**Feb. 1985:** Greg Valentine Wins Tito Santana's Intercontinental Title ... But Does He Deserve To Be Champion? Also: Ronnie Garvin, Warriors-Sheepherders, Flair-Billy Jack, Nikita Koloff.

**April 1985:** Six-Man Riot! Road Warriors & Ellering vs. Rhodes, Rich, & Anderson. Also: Tonga Kid, tomorrow's stars, Adams-Kevin, Flair-Jack, Terminators.

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**June 1985:** Are The WWF Rulebreakers Singling Out Barry Windham For Destruction? Also: Zbyszko-Backlund, Rhodes-Blanchard, Tommy Rich, Oliver-Haynes.

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**Aug. 1985:** Ten Days Of Blood And Glory: The Road Warriors Invade Japan! Also: Terry Taylor, Magnum T.A., Bugsy McGraw, Sheik & Volkoff-Windham & Rotundo, 20th anniversary.

**Oct. 1985:** David Schultz Gets An NWA Title Shot: Ric Flair—"I Wrestle The Men Hulk Hogan Is Afraid Of!" Also: Misty Blue, Rick Martel, Kendall Windham, George Steele, Killer Brooks, all-time top 10.

**May 1986:** Von Erich Family Feud: Is Lance Coming Between Kevin And Kerry? Also: Hansen-Hall, Hillbillies-Beefcake & Valentine, Butch Reed, Santana-Ventura.

**June 1986:** Kerry Reveals His Secret: "I've Told Magnum T.A. How To Beat Ric Flair!" Also: Steve Williams, Hogan-Orton, Flair-Bockwinkel, Lex Luger.

**Nov. 1986:** Morton & Gibson Take A Trip To Badstreet U.S.A.: The Rock 'n' Roll Express vs. The Freebirds. Also: Eddie Gilbert, Hogan-Orndorff, Mike Von Erich, Mulligan-Bass.

**Dec. 1986:** Ric Flair's NWA Title Reign: Last Chance To Silence The Critics! Also: Nikita Koloff, Gilbert & Sting, Hogan-Piper, Abdullah-Adams, Nick Bockwinkel.

**Jan. 1987:** Bobby Heenan's Bitter Crusade To Destroy Hulk Hogan. Also: Borne & Sawyer, Garvins, Ted DiBiase, Misty Blue Simmes.

**Feb. 1987:** Tragedy Strikes Wrestling: Magnum T.A. Needs Your Prayers Now More Than Ever. Also: Roberts-Steamboat, Crusher Yurkot, Terry Gordy, Wendell Cooley.

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**June 1987:** The Hart Foundation vs. The Can-Am's: Special Analysis Of This WWF Superfeud! Also: Nick Bockwinkel, Paul Orndorff, Rhodes & Murdoch, Steve Williams.

**July 1987:** Missy Hyatt: Will She Kiss And Tell In The WWF? Also: Chris Adams, Hart Foundation, Luger & Horsemen, Nikita-Cornette, Stan Hansen.

**Sept. 1987:** Independence Day! Also: Hennig-Bockwinkel, Hart Foundation, Koloffs, Bubba Rogers, Missy Hyatt.

**Dec. 1987:** Hulk Hogan: Will He Be Drowned By The New Wave Of Challengers? Also: Hennig-Lawler, Windham-Steiner, Flair-Williams, Brutus Beefcake, Rennie Garvin.

**Jan. 1988:** The Experts Agree: The Road Warriors Will Turn Bad In 1988! Also: Koloff-Taylor, Curt Hennig, Duggan-DiBiase.

**Feb. 1988:** Ric Flair Admits: "I'm Nothing Without The NWA Belt!" Also: Kerry Von Erich, Jim Cornette, Hogan-Andre, Hennig-Lawler, Terry Taylor.

**March 1988:** After Four Years As Champion ... Only Hulk Hogan Can Beat Hulk Hogan. Also: Warriors-Demolition, Steve Williams, Luger & Dillon, Calgary, Terry Gordy.

**May 1988:** Belt Or No Belt ... Hulk Hogan Is Still The People's Champion! Also: Owen Hart, Tatum & Victory, Scott Hall, Madusa Miceli, Luger-Am.

**June 1988:** How Sting's War With Ric Flair Could Make Him A Horseman! Also: Bobby Heenan, Martel-Zenk, Kerry-Gordy, Ted DiBiase, Nikita Koloff.

**Aug. 1988:** World Tag Title Power Shift! Also: Windham & Luger, Demolition, Taylor-Freebirds, Paul Ellering, Owen & Bret.

**Oct. 1988:** The Fantastics Declare: "We Will Not Share Our Fans With The Rock 'n' Roll Express!" Also: Rhodes-Windham, Curt Hennig, Roberts-Rude, Rougeaus, Jim Garvin.

**Jan. 1989:** The Horsemen Destroyed! The World Title Gained! But The Midnight Express Must Still Prove Themselves! Also: Top Guns, Hart & Rougeaus, Andre-Savage-Hulk, Terry Gordy, Kevin Von Erich.

**March 1989:** Scared Stiff! "Don't Say Snake!" Also: Jeff Jarrett, Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Bam Bam Bigelow, Hercules, Iron Sheik.

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**Aug. 1989 (Special Issue):** Supercard Sunday! Exclusive Coverage Of WrestleMania V And Clash Of Champions IV. Also: Kerry-Embry, Randy Savage, Great Muta, Ted DiBiase, Teddy Long.

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**Jan. 1997: It Could Happen! Hogan's Next Move ... Buy WCW!** Also: Undertaker, New Jack, Owen-Bulldog, Ted DiBiase.

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# Wrestler<sup>®</sup>

## TOP 10

- 1 TRIPLE-H**  
269, Greenwich, CT  
(1) WWE Raw champion
- 2 KENTA KOBASHI**  
282, Fukuchiyama, Japan  
(3) GHC heavyweight champion
- 3 JOHN B. LAYFIELD**  
306, Roscoe, TX  
(2) WWE Smackdown champion
- 4 CHRIS BENOIT**  
224, Edmonton, Alberta  
(-) No. 1 contender: WWE Raw title
- 5 EDGE**  
240, Toronto, Ontario  
(10) No. 2 contender: WWE Raw title
- 6 THE UNDERTAKER**  
304, Dallas, TX  
(9) No. 1 contender: WWE Smackdown title
- 7 JEFF JARRETT**  
230, Nashville, TN  
(7) NWA heavyweight champion
- 8 TOSHIAKI KAWADA**  
245, Ashikaga, Japan  
(5) All-Japan Triple Crown champion
- 9 RANDY ORTON**  
265, St. Louis, MO  
(4) No. 3 contender: WWE Raw title
- 10 KENSUKE SASAKI**  
251, Tokyo, Japan  
(-) IWGP heavyweight champion



*The Undertaker*

## TAG TEAMS

- 1 WILLIAM REGAL & EUGENE**  
Combined weight: 474 pounds  
(9) WWE Raw tag team champions
- 2 RENE DUPREE & KENZO SUZUKI**  
Combined weight: 516 pounds  
(1) WWE Smackdown tag team champions
- 3 KENDO KA SHIN & YUJI NAGATA**  
Combined weight: 423 pounds  
(8) All-Japan International tag team champions
- 4 MINORU SUZUKI & YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA**  
Combined weight: 514 pounds  
(2) IWGP International tag team champions
- 5 B.G. JAMES & KONNAN**  
Combined weight: 484 pounds  
(-) NWA tag team champions
- 6 REY MISTERIO JR. & ROB VAN DAM**  
Combined weight: 400 pounds  
(6) No. 1 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title
- 7 ROBERT CONWAY & SYLVAN GRENIER**  
Combined weight: 475 pounds  
(4) No. 1 contenders: WWE Raw tag title
- 8 CHRIS HARRIS & JAMES STORM**  
Combined weight: 516 pounds  
(-) No. 1 contenders: NWA tag title
- 9 MITSU HARU MISAWA & YOSHINARI OGAWA**  
Combined weight: 430 pounds  
(5) GHC tag team champions
- 10 BUH BUH RAY & D-VON DUDLEY**  
Combined weight: 579 pounds  
(10) No. 2 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title

## WWE RAW

Raw Champion:

**TRIPLE-H**

(C) 269, Greenwich, CT

- 1—CHRIS BENOIT**  
(5) 224, Edmonton, Alberta
- 2—EDGE**  
(3) 240, Toronto, Ontario
- 3—RANDY ORTON**  
(1) 265, St. Louis, MO
- 4—SHELTON BENJAMIN**  
(2) 245, Spartanburg, SC
- 5—BATISTA**  
(8) 318, Washington, DC
- 6—CHRIS JERICHO**  
(4) 225, Winnipeg, Manitoba
- 7—GENE SNITSKY**  
(6) 307, Nesquehoning, PA
- 8—CHRISTIAN**  
(7) 225, Toronto, Ontario
- 9—MAVEN**  
(10) 210, Chantilly, VA
- 10—RHINO**  
(-) 275, Detroit, MI

## WWE SMACKDOWN

Smackdown Champion:

**JOHN B. LAYFIELD**

(C) 306, Roscoe, TX

- 1—THE UNDERTAKER**  
(2) 304, Dallas, TX
- 2—BOOKER T**  
(1) 250, Houston, TX
- 3—EDDIE GUERRERO**  
(6) 223, El Paso, TX
- 4—JOHN CENA**  
(-) 260, West Newbury, MA
- 5—THE BIG SHOW**  
(4) 485, Aiken, SC
- 6—KURT ANGLE**  
(5) 233, Pittsburgh, PA
- 7—SPIKE DUDLEY**  
(7) 155, Providence, RI
- 8—HEIDENREICH**  
(-) 320, New Orleans, LA
- 9—REY MISTERIO JR.**  
(8) 163, San Diego, CA
- 10—JESUS**  
(-) 254, Orange, CA

## OVW

OVW Champion:

**CHRIS CAGE**

(C) 220, Youngstown, OH

- 1—CHAD TOLAND**  
(-) 228, Boston, MA
- 2—MATT MORGAN**  
(1) 330, Fairfield, CT
- 3—JOHNNY NITRO**  
(3) 204, Los Angeles, CA
- 4—JOHNNY JETER**  
(-) 218, San Diego, CA
- 5—KEN DOANE**  
(5) 210, Louisville, KY
- 6—ELIJAH BURKE**  
(-) 230, Jacksonville, FL
- 7—MUHAMMAD HASSAN**  
(-) 231, Syracuse, NY
- 8—MATT CAPPOTELLI**  
(4) 220, Norwich, NY
- 9—JOEY MATTHEWS**  
(7) 213, Fayetteville, NC
- 10—SEVEN**  
(8) 278, Memphis, TN

## RING OF HONOR

ROH Champion:

**SAMOA JOE**

(C) 270, American Samoa

- 1—JOHN WALTERS**  
(1) 220, Boston, MA
- 2—C.M. PUNK**  
(2) 220, Chicago, IL
- 3—AUSTIN ARIES**  
(4) 202, Milwaukee, WI
- 4—HOMICIDE**  
(5) 220, Brooklyn, NY
- 5—LOW-KI**  
(7) 170, Brooklyn, NY
- 6—BRYAN DANIELSON**  
(3) 185, Aberdeen, WA
- 7—NIGEL MCGUINNNESS**  
(8) 220, London, England
- 8—JIMMY RAVE**  
(-) 177, Atlanta, GA
- 9—JAY LETHAL**  
(-) 192, Elizabeth, NJ
- 10—ALEX SHELLEY**  
(6) 199, Detroit, MI



# OFFICIAL RATINGS

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

**For period ended December 3, 2004**

**AWA SUPREME: Champion**—The Prophet; 1—Mason the Mangler; 2—Billy Maverick; 3—Brad Lamen; 4—Eric Draven; 5—Vito Andretti; 6—Apollo; 7—Kliff Hanger; 8—Nick Noble; 9—Spazz; 10—Damien Divine.

**CENTRAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion**—Terry Alan; 1—Tommy Green; 2—Maddawg; 3—Mongoose; 4—Jad T. Lungini; 5—Raziel; 6—Guido; 7—Redneck Superstar; 8—Cherry; 9—Skip Sherwood; 10—Bob Russell.

**FAR NORTH WRESTLING: Champion**—T. Rantula; 1—Mike Quackenbush; 2—Dennis Gregory; 3—Dorian Deville; 4—Slyk Wagner Brown; 5—Sterling James Keenan; 6—Claudio Castagnoli; 7—Kevin Grace; 8—Lord Zoltan; 9—Larry Sweeney; 10—Leslie Leatherman.

**KYDA PRO WRESTLING: Champion**—C.A. Elliott; 1—Tank Thomas; 2—Sean Patrick; 3—Dan Severn; 4—Shane McIntyer; 5—Chris Nightmare; 6—Chuckyy Wynn; 7—Billy Johnson; 8—Simply Luscious; 9—John Kerman; 10—Joseph Brooks.

**NEW AGE WRESTLING: Champion**—Chris Collins; 1—Scotty Rucker; 2—Mike Williams; 3—Rick Kelly; 4—Gregory Vercetti; 5—Kamakazi Kid; 6—Matty D; 7—Ryan Andrews; 8—Tony Fitz; 9—Jimmy Valiant; 10—Shawn Christian.

**NWA WILDSIDE: Champion**—Onyx; 1—Jason Cross; 2—Ray Gordy; 3—Mikal Adrian; 4—Todd Sexton; 5—Jeremy V; 6—Rainman; 7—Fast Eddie; 8—Caprice Coleman; 9—Masada; 10—BioHazard.

**PWF NORTHEAST: Champion**—Jose Perez; 1—Jason Blade; 2—Triplelicious; 3—Billy Black; 4—Pat Masters; 5—Ebony Blade; 6—Evan Siks; 7—Dave Padula; 8—T.J. Richter; 9—Jon Thornhill; 10—Riot.

**STEEL RAGE PRO WRESTLING: Champion**—Luc Lapointe; 1—The Prophet; 2—Brandon Groom; 3—Kenny Campbell; 4—Bernard Funk; 5—Timmy J; 6—Tyler Bateman; 7—Christopher Matthews; 8—Pork Chop; 9—Jack Dalton; 10—Harry Sanchez.

**WORLD CLASS EXTREME WRESTLING: Champion**—Ali Steele; 1—Hangtime; 2—DJ P.Roc; 3—The Stro; 4—Ouga Bouga; 5—Aaron Devil; 6—Justin Feeche; 7—Steve Michaels; 8—Truitt Fields; 9—Tre G; 10—Tyrone Knox.

**WORLD OF HURT WRESTLING: Champion**—Texas Outlaw; 1—Brodie Lee; 2—Danger; 3—Shane Alden; 4—Jeff Starr; 5—Buttery Bert; 6—Nick Neighborhood; 7—Steve Kruz; 8—Chuck Deep; 9—Punk; 10—Todd Taylor.

**WORLD PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING: Champion**—Dino Divine; 1—Gemini; 2—Flamingo Kid Pinky; 3—Jack Molson; 4—Kage; 5—The Cremator; 6—Steve the Teacher; 7—Cannon Ball; 8—Mista Hood; 9—Glenn Osbourne; 10—The Patriot.

**WORLD XTREME WRESTLING: Champion**—Jeff Coleman; 1—Samu; 2—Tommy Suede; 3—Mana the Polynesian Warrior; 4—Sinister X; 5—Cabbie; 6—Boogalou; 7—Havoc; 8—C.J. O'Doyle; 9—Kris Chambers; 10—Sugaa.

## NWA

**NWA Champion:**  
**JEFF JARRETT**

(C) 230, Nashville, TN

**1—MONTY BROWN**

(2) 268, Detroit, MI

**2—JEFF HARDY**

(1) 212, Cameron, NC

**3—A.J. STYLES**

(4) 202, Gainesville, GA

**4—RAVEN**

(3) 243, Short Hills, NJ

**5—SPYDER**

(-) 225, New York, NY

**6—SCOTT HALL**

(-) 282, Miami, FL

**7—J.T. WOLFEN**

(8) 297, New Haven, CT

**8—DALLAS PAGE**

(-) 256, Point Pleasant, NJ

**9—ABYSS**

(5) 295, Cincinnati, OH

**10—PETEY WILLIAMS**

(7) 180, Windsor, Ontario

## TNA

**NWA Champion:**  
**JEFF JARRETT**

(C) 230, Nashville, TN

**1—PETEY WILLIAMS**

(1) 180, Windsor, Ontario

**2—MONTY BROWN**

(4) 268, Detroit, MI

**3—JEFF HARDY**

(2) 212, Cameron, NC

**4—A.J. STYLES**

(3) 202, Gainesville, GA

**5—CHRIS SABIN**

(8) 207, Hell, MI

**6—RAVEN**

(5) 243, Short Hills, NJ

**7—ABYSS**

(6) 295, Cincinnati, OH

**8—HECTOR GARZA**

(-) 220, Monterrey, Mexico

**9—RON KILLINGS**

(7) 230, Charlotte, NC

**10—SCOTT HALL**

(-) 282, Miami, FL

## JAPAN

**1—KENTA KOBASHI**

(1) 282, Fukuichi, Japan

GHC heavyweight champion

**2—TOSHIKI KAWADA**

(2) 245, Ashikaga, Japan

All-Japan Triple Crown champion

**3—KENSUKE SASAKI**

(3) 251, Tokyo, Japan

IWGP heavyweight champion

**4—HIROYOSHI TENZAN**

(-) 270, Tokyo, Japan

**5—MITSU HARU MISAWA**

(-) 228, Ashikaga, Japan

**6—HEAT**

(4) 204, Tokyo, Japan

**7—NAOMICHI MARUFUJI**

(-) 202, Sapporo, Japan

**8—TAIYO KEA**

(8) 235, Honolulu, HI

**9—MASA CHONO**

(-) 235, Tokyo, Japan

**10—JUN AKIYAMA**

(5) 225, Hiroshima, Japan

## MEXICO

**1—UNIVERSO DOS MIL**

(-) 240, Mexico City, Mexico

**2—EL HIJO DEL SANTO**

(2) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico

**3—ULTIMO GUERRERO**

(3) 173, Mexico City, Mexico

**4—L.A. PARK**

(5) 235, Torreon, Mexico

**5—LATIN LOVER**

(8) 190, Monterrey, Mexico

**6—SHOCKER**

(7) 185, Guadalajara, Mexico

**7—HEAVY METAL**

(4) 180, Mexico City, Mexico

**8—REY BUCANERO**

(-) 197, Mexico City, Mexico

**9—PERRO AGUAYO JR.**

(-) 165, Zacatecas, Mexico

**10—DR. WAGNER JR.**

(-) 215, Mexico City, Mexico



# WOW<sup>®</sup>

## Remember Him?

Of course you remember him! Who could ever forget him? And if you're a loyal TNA fan, right about now you're hoping that this man has lots and lots of good ideas floating around in his head. Dusty Rhodes was voted the new TNA director of authority at Victory Road and picked up the title of head of TNA Creative at a meeting a few weeks later. "The American Dream" is a three-time former NWA World champion and a former booker for Jim Crockett Promotions during the heyday of The Four Horsemen, so he is qualified for the job. But just to be absolutely clear: This photo has a lot to do with Rhodes' success in Bunkhouse Stampedes in the 1980s and was not—repeat, not!—his response to our question of what TNA stars should do if they don't like his plans for them.

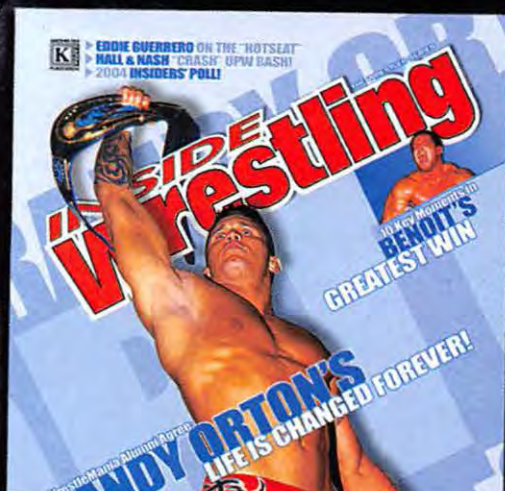




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